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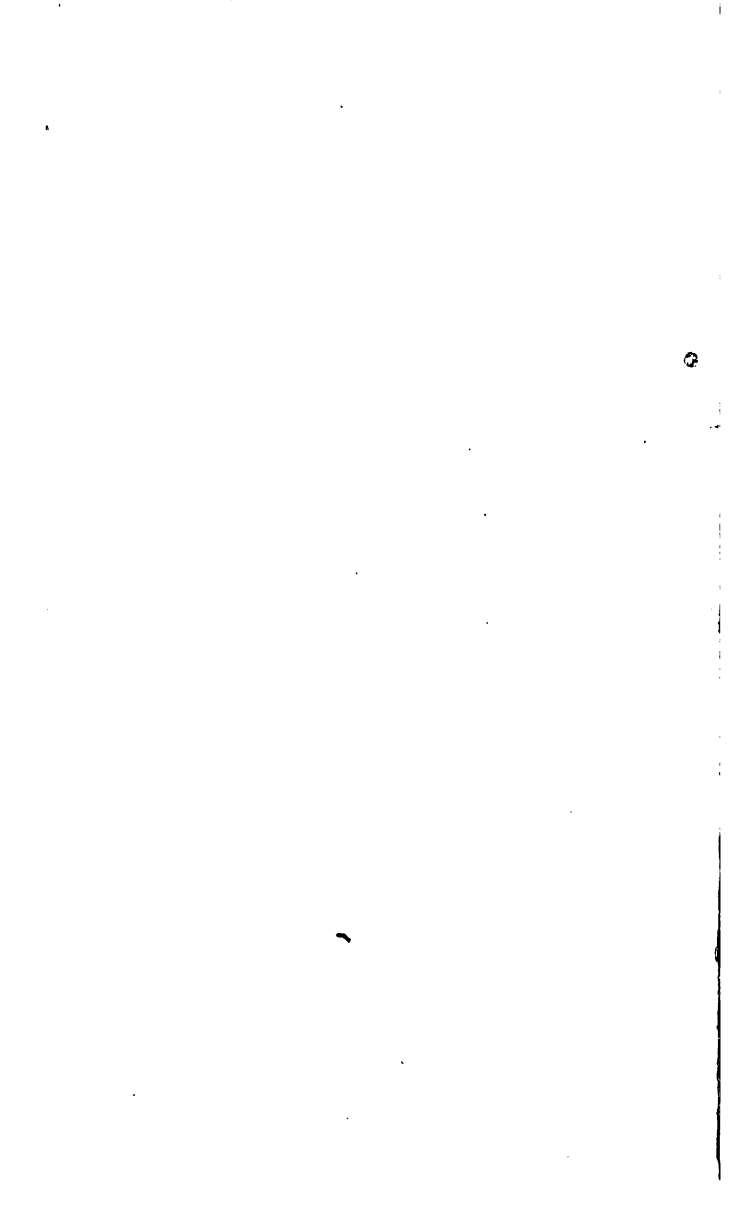
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~~L. D. ...~~

March
1881



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SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

from a Painting by himself.

LONDON JOHN B. MILES 1821.

THE
"COMPLETE WORKS"
OF
SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS,

FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

WITH AN
ORIGINAL MEMOIR, AND ANECDOTES
OF
THE AUTHOR:

*Quietè et purè atque eleganter actæ
Ætatis placida ac lenis recordatio.—CICERO.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MEMOIRS

OF

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

THE family of Reynolds is of very ancient standing in the county of Devon, and has been particularly distinguished for its connexion with the church. At the time of the Reformation, there were, at Oxford, two very extraordinary divines of this name, John and William Reynolds, the former a zealous protestant, and the latter, who was his younger brother, a no less zealous catholic. Of the same lineage, in the reign of Charles I. was Richard Reynolds, Fellow of Exeter College, and afterwards rector of Stoke Fleming, and Woodley, in his native county. He suffered great hardships in the rebellion, being turned out of doors with his wife and six children. He lived, however, to be restored to his preferment, and died very near one hundred years old. This venerable ecclesiastic had a son, who was the father of three clergymen : 1. John, who was bred at Eton School, and next at King's College, Cambridge, where he proceeded

to the degree of Master of Arts, but obtained that of Bachelor in Divinity from the University of Oxford, by diploma, in 1718. He was then canon of St. Peter's church, at Exeter, and afterwards became Fellow of Eton College, where he died at the age of eighty-seven, in 1758. His nephew painted his portrait, of which there is an engraving by James Mac Ardell. This divine left most of his property to Exeter College, Oxford, and very little, if any, to his relatives; for which this reason may be assigned: He was the only son of his father by his first wife; and the old gentleman, when on his death-bed, was induced to cut him entirely off in favour of the children by his second marriage. There happened, however, to be an estate which was overlooked by him in this disposition of his property, of which John Reynolds became possessed, and enjoyed it till his death. 2. Joshua, who was of Corpus-Christi College, where he took the degree of Master of Arts in 1697, and that of Bachelor in Divinity in 1707. He became beneficed in his native county, and had also a prebend in the cathedral of Exeter. 3. Samuel, who was of Baliol College, where he took the degree of Master of Arts, April 20, 1705. He became master of the free grammar school at Plympton St. Mary, and minister of the same parish, which was all the preferment he ever enjoyed. He married Theophila Potter, the daughter of Sampson Potter, of Baliol College, whose father, Francis, wrote a

noted book on the apocalyptical number of 666. The wife of this Sampson Potter was the daughter of Thomas Baker, a profound mathematician, who was vicar of Ilton, in Somersetshire.

Mr. Samuel Reynolds had eleven children, five of whom died in their infancy; the subject of the present memoir was the seventh, and was born at Plympton, July 16, 1723, and baptized there on the 30th of the same month. It has been asserted that, he was called Joshua by his father, in the hope that such a singular or uncommon name might prove beneficial to him at a future period of his life, by attracting for him the patronage of some person with a similar prefix. This curious account deserves some notice; because it shows how easy it is to pervert a simple occurrence into something remarkable and uncommon. The plain truth is, the child was named after his uncle Joshua, who was represented on this occasion by one Mr. Ivie, while Mrs. Anne Reynolds, of Exeter, became godmother, and had a Mrs. Darley for her proxy. There was in this, therefore, nothing at all extraordinary; though it is more than probable that Mr. Samuel Reynolds was induced to choose the name of Joshua, in the present instance, with the hope of securing for his child the particular favour of an uncle who had no issue of his own. It is, however, singular, that the parochial register of Plympton has, through some unaccountable negligence or inadvertency, deprived him of his

baptismal name, for in the entry there he is styled, "Joseph, son of Samuel Reynolds : " to account for which, Mr. Malone supposes, that the name was originally written on a slip of paper thus, " Jos. son of Samuel Reynolds ; " and that the person who made the entry, by attempting to perfect the abbreviature, committed a blunder. This, we have no doubt, was the case, happening ourselves to have met in the same county with similar errors in the church registers, occasioned by the culpable negligence of the clergy, in entrusting the care of those important records to their ignorant parish clerks. One blunder of this kind had the effect of depriving a person of a considerable estate, to which he certainly was entitled.

Mr. Samuel Reynolds was a very worthy man and a good scholar, but too indolent and abstracted to discharge his trust properly as a preceptor : in consequence of which, the number of his pupils dwindled gradually away, till at last he had only one left. As, however, there was a tolerable stipend annexed to the situation, independent of that which arose from the living, he made himself very easy, and took no pains to increase his income, though he had a family of six children, five of whom were girls, wholly dependant upon him for their support. Under a parent naturally indulgent, and possessing little energy, Joshua was not likely to make any remarkable progress in grammatical learning. It has been said by some that he was intended for the

church, but according to his own account, the views of his father concerning him inclined to the medical profession; from which he was diverted by the inclination which Joshua manifested to the art of painting. Dr. Johnson, in his *Life of Cowley*, having mentioned the circumstance which inspired that poet with the charm of verse, says, "Such are the accidents which, sometimes remembered, and perhaps sometimes forgotten, produce that particular designation of mind, and propensity for some certain science or employment, which is commonly called genius. The true genius is a mind of large general powers, accidentally determined to some particular direction. Sir Joshua Reynolds had the first fondness for his art excited by the perusal of Richardson's *Treatise*." But if the book here noticed fixed the inclination of Reynolds to painting as a profession, it is certain that he had at an earlier period given strong indications of imitative talents; for, at eight years of age, by reading the "*Jesuits' Perspective*," he ventured to take a drawing of his father's school. This being shown to Mr. Reynolds, he looked at it with astonishment, and finding it perfectly correct, exclaimed, "Now this exemplifies what the author of the *Perspective* asserts in his preface, that by observing the rules laid down in his book, a man may do wonders—for this is wonderful." Another of his juvenile performances was the representation of a book-case, drawn on the back of a Latin exer-

cise, and underneath his father wrote, " Done by Joshua out of pure idleness." We learn also that his elder sisters had a similar taste, so that, in fact, there was a little academy of drawing in the parsonage of Plympton, where the young artists assisted and even rivalled each other, by seeing who could copy best such prints as the library of their father afforded, particularly those in Dryden's translation of Plutarch, and the emblems of Jacob Cats. The imitations by Joshua attracted the notice of a Mr. Cranch, who visited the family, and to whose opinion, it appears, great deference was paid by Mr. Samuel Reynolds. This gentleman watched the progress of the boy, till at last he ventured to recommend that he should be suffered to adopt painting as a profession. It must be confessed that the advice was rather bold, at a time when the art was as low as it well could be in this country; and when, of course, there were few excitements, in a lucrative point of view, for any one to follow it as a calling. Notwithstanding this, and the predilection which old Mr. Reynolds had for the healing art, as that which was most likely to prove permanently beneficial to his son, the suggestion of Mr. Cranch prevailed, and it was resolved that Joshua should become a pupil of his countryman, Thomas Hudson, who then stood at the head of his profession as a portrait painter. Accordingly, on the fourteenth of October, 1741, young Reynolds entered London, and on the eighteenth of the same

month, being the festival of St. Luke, the patron of painters, he was articled to his preceptor. The reputation of Hudson is alone a proof of the wretched state to which the art was reduced in England. All his merit consisted in producing a mere likeness or map of the face; but after painting the head he could do no more, being obliged to employ Van Hacken; a Dutch artist, to complete the figure and add the drapery. Hudson had been the scholar of Richardson, whose daughter he married; and though so very indifferent an artist, he succeeded in gaining most of the business of his time; nor, as Lord Orford observes, "could Vanloo first, or Liotard afterwards, shake his popularity, the country gentlemen being faithful to their compatriot, and content with his honest similitudes, the fair tied wigs, blue velvet coats, and white satin waistcoats, which he bestowed liberally on his customers, and which, with complacency, they beheld multiplied in Faber's mezzotintos." It is remarkable that, though Hudson had not a spark of genius himself, he was the instructor of three men of very superior and original talent. These were Reynolds, Mortimer, and Wright of Derby: whence it appears that men of very ordinary abilities may be successful in teaching others, though incapable of producing any thing original or excellent themselves.

Hudson seems to have had an early insight into the merits of Reynolds, and to have antici-

pated what really happened, that he would prove a rival, with whom there could be no chance of coping. He endeavoured, therefore, to keep down, as much as he could, the aspiring mind of his scholar, and instead of setting him to study after the living model, or the antique, he employed him in copying drawings, particularly those of Guercino. The youth complied with his humour, and executed every task with an accuracy and spirit that served to increase the astonishment and spleen of Hudson. In this manner he may be said to have wasted above two years of the four for which he was articled; but though his master did all that lay in his power to hinder the progress of his pupil, he could not prevent the ascendancy which he dreaded. The portrait of a domestic female, painted by young Reynolds, exhibited such a strength of expression and exactness of resemblance, that Hudson, while he admired the performance, determined from that moment to get rid of one who created him so much uneasiness. Having formed this unjust resolution, he was not long in finding an opportunity to carry it into effect. One evening, Hudson ordered him to take a portrait to Van Hacken, the drapery painter; but rain coming on very heavily, Reynolds delayed carrying it till the next morning. This Hudson knew, and made it the pretext of a quarrel, though at the same time he must have known that no delay had been suffered by the circumstance, for the

picture was taken, according to the command, before breakfast the next morning. Notwithstanding this, Hudson immediately seized the opportunity thus afforded of upbraiding his pupil with a disobedience of his express injunction, and without giving him time either for explanation, or for a communication with his friends, ordered him to quit his house. Reynolds submissively remonstrated, and desired leave to write to his father, who, from so prompt and severe a punishment, might naturally be apprehensive that his son must have committed some enormous offence. But no appeal to the principle of justice can operate upon an envious disposition. Hudson was glad of any incident, however trivial, that offered, of freeing himself from the presence of a youth whose talents made him conscious of his own imbecility. Reynolds withdrew to the house of a relation, and soon received a letter from his father, directing him to return into Devonshire. Here he began, without any farther instruction, his career as an artist; and it has been well observed, that, however mortifying the circumstance might have been at the time, it was fortunate in the event, for hereby he was saved from falling into the bad manner of his master. In confirmation of this remark, the cases of Mortimer and Wright are adduced, who, though they shone in the respective departments of the art which they struck out for themselves, could obtain no celebrity in portraiture; their paintings in that line, though not destitut

of merit, exhibited too much of the school of Hudson, and were executed with what is technically called "a heavy hand."

Reynolds was in his twentieth year when he returned home, with the scanty elements of the art which he had acquired under a selfish and incompetent instructor. But though his education had been thus neglected, his active mind retained its vigour, and he ventured upon the exercise of portrait painting at Plymouth Dock, under the patronage of Lord Mount Edgumbe, whose influence there could not fail to prove of the most essential advantage to the young artist. Here Reynolds painted the portraits of several naval officers, particularly two of Captain Hamilton, father of the late Marquis of Abercorn: one of a large size, which is now at Stanmore; and another a family piece, in which that gentleman is represented with his children. This last picture is in the collection of Lord Eliot, at Port Eliot, in Cornwall. About the same period he painted an admirable picture of a Boy reading by a reflected light, which was sold, in 1796, to Sir Henry Englefield, for thirty-five guineas. It has been said, that he used to lament the time lost by him after his return into Devonshire; but it is difficult to reconcile this with the fact, that on reviewing the works executed by him at this period of life, he expressed his regret that he had not made subsequently a greater progress in the art. He was very much employed

while he resided at Plymouth Dock, and his pictures painted there, not only evince his improvement in every respect, but may challenge a comparison with many of his most celebrated performances.

Soon after the death of his father, which happened on Christmas day, in 1746, he left his native county the second time, and took lodgings in St. Martin's Lane, which was then, and long continued to be, the favourite residence of artists. He had even now attained considerable popularity; for in some of the papers of that time, there appeared these complimentary lines addressed to him, on his portrait of a Lady in a capuchin and veil :

Whilst th' original's unknown,
I still can call my heart my own,
Unhurt the copy view ;
Whilst thus the beauteous face you shade,
And eyes too bright by nature made,
Nor death, nor wounds ensue.

Thus at the sun through mists we gaze,
Our sight from his enfeebling rays
The vapour dark securing ;
But when no medium screens his light,
His beams are so severely bright,
The blaze there's no enduring !

It had long been the wish of Mr. Reynolds to visit Rome, but his circumstances, and the disturbed state of the times, rendering a journey by land impracticable, the idea was abandoned till

the spring of the year 1749, when he received an invitation to accompany Captain Keppel, who was then about to sail in the *Centurion* for the Mediterranean. This offer he gladly accepted, and on the 24th of May the ship arrived at Lisbon; on the 9th of June at Gibraltar; from whence she proceeded, according to her destination, to Algiers, to settle a dispute with the Dey, respecting the plunder of an English vessel by his cruisers. Having terminated this business, Captain Keppel set sail for Port Mahon, in Minorca, where Mr. Reynolds was entertained two months by General Blakeney, the governor, at his own table. He had not been long on this island, when, in riding down a hill, he fell from his horse, and cut his upper lip so deeply, that the scar remained through life.

During his residence at Minorca, he painted several portraits of naval and military officers; by which means he recruited his finances sufficiently to enable him to prosecute the grand object of his voyage, which was to visit the principal cities of Italy, particularly Rome. Accordingly, on his perfect recovery from the casualty which he had met with, he embarked for Leghorn, where he made no stay, but hastened forwards to the celebrated emporium of all that was venerable and sublime in the Fine Arts. Soon after his arrival at Rome, and while the impression first made by the wonders which surrounded him was yet warm in his mind, he wrote to some of his friends in England, saying,

“ that if it were possible to give them an idea of what was to be seen there, the remains of antiquity, the sculpture, paintings, and architecture, &c. they would think it worth while, nay, they would break through all obstacles, and set off immediately for Rome.”

Greatly, however, as he was affected by the splendid monuments which in every direction caught his eye; in his own immediate line of art he experienced a very remarkable disappointment. Accustomed to regard the name of Raffaele with veneration, as the head of the art, he naturally enough expected to behold works transcending all the ideas he had formed of the sublime and beautiful in painting. But, instead of being enraptured, on entering the Vatican, by the productions of that mighty genius, he viewed them with an insensibility for which he could not then account, and of the cause of which he had not the least suspicion. The circumstance, though sufficiently mortifying, would have been exceedingly disheartening had he not found that his case was far from being singular. His account of the humiliation which he felt, and of the use which he made of it, is too interesting and instructive to be given in any other language than his own: “ It has frequently happened,” says he, “ as I was informed by the keeper of the Vatican, that many of those whom he had conducted through the various apartments of that edifice, when about to be dismissed, have asked

for the works of Raffaele, and would not believe that they had already passed through the rooms where they are preserved ; so little impression had those performances made on them. One of the first painters now in France, once told me that this circumstance happened to himself ; though he now looks on Raffaele with that veneration which he deserves from all painters and lovers of the art. I remember very well my own disappointment when I first visited the Vatican ; but on confessing my feelings to a brother student, of whose ingenuousness I had a high opinion, he acknowledged that the works of Raffaele had the same effect on him, or rather that they did not produce the effect which he expected. This was a great relief to my mind, and on enquiring further of other students, I found that those persons only, who from natural imbecility appeared to be incapable of ever relishing those divine performances, made pretensions to instantaneous raptures on first beholding them. In justice to myself, however, I must add, that though disappointed and mortified at not finding myself enraptured with the works of this great master, I did not for a moment conceive or suppose that the name of Raffaele, and those admirable paintings in particular, owed their reputation to the ignorance and prejudice of mankind ; on the contrary, my not relishing them, as I was conscious I ought to have done, was one of the most humiliating circumstances that ever happened to

me : I found myself in the midst of works executed upon principles with which I was unacquainted; I felt my ignorance, and stood abashed. All the indigested notions of painting which I had brought with me from England, where the art was in the lowest state it had ever been in, (it could not indeed be lower) were to be totally done away, and eradicated from my mind. It was necessary, as it is expressed on a very solemn occasion, that I should become as a little child. Notwithstanding my disappointment, I proceeded to copy some of those excellent works. I viewed them again and again; I even affected to feel their merit, and to admire them more than I really did. In a short time, a new taste and new perceptions began to dawn upon me; and I was convinced that I had originally formed a false opinion of the perfection of art, and that this great painter was well entitled to the high rank which he holds in the estimation of the world. The truth is, that if these works had really been what I expected, they would have contained beauties superficial and alluring, but by no means such as would have entitled them to the great reputation which they have so long and so justly obtained. Having since that period frequently revolved this in my mind, I am now clearly of opinion, that a relish for the higher excellencies of the art is an acquired taste, which no man ever possessed without long cultivation, and great labour and attention. On such occasions as that

which I have mentioned, we are often ashamed of our apparent dullness ; as if it were to be expected that our minds, like tinder, should instantly catch fire from the divine spark of Raffaele's genius. I flatter myself that now it would be so, and that I have a just and lively perception of his great powers ; but let it be always remembered, that the excellence of his style is not on the surface, but lies deep, and at first view is seen but mistily. It is the florid style which strikes at once, and captivates the eye for a time without ever satisfying the judgment. Nor does painting in this respect differ from other arts : a just poetical taste, and the acquisition of a nice discriminative musical ear, are equally the work of time. Even the eye, however perfect in itself, is oft unable to distinguish between the brilliancy of two diamonds, though the experienced jeweller will be amazed at its blindness, not considering that there was a time when he himself could not have been able to pronounce which of the two was the most perfect, and that his own power of discrimination was acquired by slow and imperceptible degrees."

Thus happily persuaded that the fault was in himself, and not in Raffaele, that he did not perceive the beauties which for above two centuries had been the theme of admiration, Mr. Reynolds resolved to devote his time at Rome to the study of these works, till he should have acquired a

knowledge of the true principles on which their merit was founded. In following up this judicious resolution, and by a diligent application, in the Vatican, to the works of Michel Angelo, Raffaelle, and Andrea Del Sarto, he caught a severe cold, which affected his head to such a degree, as occasioned a deafness that obliged him through life to use an acoustic instrument.

The state of the arts in Rome at this time may be estimated from the fact, that the students of painting, from every part of Europe, instead of applying to the works of the illustrious dead, crowded the academy of Pompeo Battoni, who appears to have been considered, even by his countrymen, as equal to Raffaelle. Such, indeed, was the popularity of this artist, that when Mr. Reynolds was about to leave England for the Mediterranean, his noble patron, Lord Mount Edgcumbe, particularly requested him to become a pupil of Battoni. Though the advice was friendly, yet, as soon as our traveller had an opportunity of judging for himself, he neglected to follow it, wisely preferring the silent instructions of the great masters of former days, to the *jejune* and gaudy manner which prevailed in the modern and degenerate school of art. Reynolds, however, while he carefully studied the paintings which abounded at Rome, never attempted to make entire copies of any of them, "conceiving," as he afterwards said, "that such a practice was but a delusive kind of

industry, requiring no effort of the mind, or of those powers of invention and disposition that ought to be particularly called out and put in action; and which otherwise would lie torpid, and lose their energy for want of exercise."

In acting thus he showed equal judgment and self-control; for the opposite course was the one commonly pursued by foreign students; who, though they did not thereby improve their talents, certainly found it for their interest, in other respects, to copy pictures. In a letter to Barry, when that artist was in Italy, Reynolds gave his opinion more explicitly on this practice. "Whilst I was at Rome," says he, "I was very little employed by the cicerones, and that I always considered as so much time lost: copying those ornamental pictures which the travelling gentlemen always bring home with them as furniture for their houses, is far from being the most profitable manner of a student spending his time. Whoever has great views, I would recommend to him, whilst at Rome, rather to live on bread and water than lose those advantages which he can never hope to enjoy a second time, and which he will find only in the Vatican, where, I will engage, no cavalier sends his students to copy for him. I do not mean this as any reproach to the gentlemen; the works in that place, though they are the proper study of an artist, make but an awkward figure painted in oil, and reduced to the size of easel pictures. The Capella Sistina is the

production of the greatest genius that was ever employed in the arts : it is worth considering by what principles that stupendous greatness of style is produced ; and endeavouring to produce something of your own on those principles, will be a more advantageous method of study than copying the St. Cecilia, in the Borghese ; or the Herodias of Guido ; which may be copied to eternity without contributing one jot towards making a man a more able painter."

Mr. Reynolds, during his residence at Rome, indulged his playful fancy occasionally in strokes of humour. There was then in that city a small society of gentlemen, artists, and others, who lived on terms of the greatest amity, and somewhat like the Bentvogel confraternity of a former day, amused themselves in scenes of frolic and festivity. While Reynolds was engaged in his studies at the Vatican, the School of Athens, by Raffaello, particularly engaged his attention, and, in one of his hours of relaxation, the thought struck him of taking the portraits of his companions, and grouping them in a sort of burlesque imitation of the celebrated picture which had occupied so much of his notice. Having formed his sketch, he showed it to his friends, each of whom recognised his part in the piece, and all were pleased with the ingenuity of the representation. This caricature, as it hath been erroneously called, is in the possession of Mr. Joseph Henry, of Strabane, in Ireland.

Another incident that happened to Reynolds during his abode at Rome, must be here mentioned, as it is one that reflects great honour upon his benevolence. Meeting with a youth, aged about fifteen, named Marchi, who appeared to be of a very docile disposition, and fond of painting, he took him into his employ, and not only gave him instruction, but support. Marchi became so much attached to his patron, that he entreated permission to accompany him to England, and being destitute of friends in his own country, his request was complied with, though the circumstances of his master were then exceedingly contracted. From Rome Mr. Reynolds travelled to Florence, where he found his fellow pupil, John Astley, who was then patronised by Sir Horace Mann, the English envoy, and principally employed in copying pictures in the ducal gallery. Here also was Joseph Wilton, the sculptor, whose portrait Reynolds painted in a manner that excited general admiration. The next city visited by our great artist was Bologna, where his stay was but short, which circumstance he used very much to regret; for he considered the frescoes of the Caracci, which are only to be found there, more fitted to impart instruction to the student than the splendid productions of Titian. "And therefore," says he, "I think those who travel would do well to allot a much greater portion of their time to that city, than it has been hitherto the custom to bestow."

After a short stay at Parma, where he contemplated with admiration the works of Corregio, he visited Modena, Milan, and Padua, in his way to Venice, at which place he continued a month, taking up his residence in the house of Zuccarelli, the celebrated painter of landscape. While there he drew some portraits, which commanded the applause of the best artists in Venice, no less than of his host, who beheld his facility of execution and power of expression with astonishment. His principal employment, however, at Venice, was to study the works of Titian, Paolo Veronese, and Tintoretto, the great masters of light and shade, who first reduced to a system what was before practised without any fixed principles. Of the method he adopted to make himself acquainted with their manner, he has himself given an account. "When I observed," says he, "an extraordinary effect of light and shade in any picture, I took a leaf of my pocket book, and darkened every part of it in the same gradation of light and shade as the picture, leaving the white paper untouched, to represent the light, and this without any attention to the subject, or to the drawing of the figures. A few trials of this kind will be sufficient to give the method of their conduct in the management of their lights. After a few experiments I found the paper blotted nearly alike: their general practice appeared to be to allow not above a quarter of the picture for the light, including, in

— this portion, both the principal and secondary lights :
— another quarter to be as dark as possible, and the
remaining half kept in mezzotint, or half shadow.”
Thus did our illustrious traveller endeavour to
penetrate into the secret principles, by which the
masters of the great school of art attained that
distinction which has rendered their works generally
estimable, as well as the objects of particular
imitation. Another practice adopted by Reynolds,
when in Italy, was to procure, at every place he
came to, one of those useful books which abound
there, called Guides, or Descriptions of the several
Cities, containing an account of the curiosities to
be found there in public and in private buildings.
Having taken a view of all that was worth seeing
— at each place, he used to minute down his obser-
vations on what he saw, in the margin of his Guide,
and sometimes, upon reflection, he would expand
these hints, and illustrate them by sketches.
What became of these interesting books we are
not told; but, judging from the recollections of
his early travels, occasionally interspersed in
his Lectures, and by the notes of his Tours
in Flanders, the wish is excited that something
— more were ascertained respecting his Italian me-
moranda.

On leaving Venice he went to Turin, but made
a very short stay there, being desirous of reaching
England before the winter. In his route from
thence, at the foot of the Alps, he had the unex-

pected satisfaction of meeting with his old master, Hudson, and Roubiliac, the sculptor, posting to Rome; where, if the latter gained improvement, it was more than the painter did; for he spent only two days in that capital, and having gone over Italy with the same rapidity, returned to France time enough to accompany his pupil in the same packet from Calais to Dover. At Paris, Reynolds was detained a short time by some commissions, and among the portraits there painted by him, was one of Mrs. Chambers, the wife of Mr., afterwards Sir William, Chambers, the celebrated architect, and another of M. Gautier, both of which have been engraved. On the 16th of October, 1752, Mr. Reynolds landed in England, and immediately proceeded to Plymouth to recruit his health, which had suffered very much by travelling and exertion. While at Plymouth he painted only two portraits, one of a young lady, and the other of Mr. Zachary Mudge, vicar of St. Andrews, in that town, the old friend of his father, and no less zealously concerned for the interests of the son. By the advice of this excellent divine, and that of Lord Mount Edgecumbe, Mr. Reynolds returned to the metropolis the same winter, accompanied by his sister Frances, who alone remained unmarried, and continued so to her death. For some time they continued in lodgings in St. Martin's Lane, and there it was that Reynolds produced his fine portrait, in the Rembrandtian style, of Joseph Marchi, wear-

ing a turban, which attracted considerable notice, and drew a crowd of visitors, among whom was Hudson; who, after examining the picture some time with great gravity, and finding no traces of his own manner in the performance, exclaimed, with a tremendous oath, "Reynolds, you don't paint so well as when you left England." This was the splenetic effusion of a mind embittered by the consciousness of its inferiority, and so it appeared to Astley, who stood by at the time, and could not help smiling at his old master's chagrin.

The popularity and business of Reynolds increasing every day, he found it necessary to take a house, and accordingly removed to a very commodious one in Great Newport Street, where he continued about eight years. One of the first portraits painted by him, after his return to London, was of the Duke of Devonshire; but though much admired, it was far exceeded by a whole length of Captain, afterwards Admiral, Keppel, who was represented standing on a rocky shore, as just escaped from shipwreck, alluding to an event which happened to that gallant officer about six years before, when he commanded a frigate on the coast of France. Of this fine picture there is an excellent mezzotinto print, scraped by a self-taught artist, named Fisher, who continued for many years to be encouraged by Reynolds. We are told that this portrait cost the painter prodigious labour, and that, after several sittings, he defaced his work and

began it anew: such was his patient industry; but it was well rewarded, for when the picture appeared, the public voice resounded with its praise, and it was generally admitted that a greater painter had not been seen in England since the days of Vandyck. It has been well observed, that long previous to this period, the painters of portrait contented themselves with exhibiting as correct a resemblance as they could; but seem not to have thought, or had not the power, of enlivening the canvass, by giving a kind of historic air to their pictures. Reynolds very soon saw how much admiration might be obtained by deviating from the insipid manner of his immediate predecessors; hence, in many of his portraits, particularly when combined in family groupes, we find much of the variety and spirit of a higher species of art. Instead of confining himself to mere likeness, in which, however, he was eminently happy, he dived, as it were, into the minds, habits, and manners of those who sat to him; whence it is that the majority of his portraits are so appropriately characteristic, that the persons whom he has depicted, will be almost as well known to posterity as if they had seen and conversed with them.

Mr. Reynolds had not been long settled in London, when that intimacy began between him and Dr. Johnson, which lasted, without abatement on either side, till the death of the illustrious sage, to whom his friend always looked up as a pre-

ceptor. The manner in which this connexion commenced has been minutely related by Boswell, on the authority of Reynolds himself. Happening to meet with the *Life of Savage*, in Devonshire, which, though published some years before, was then new to him, he began to read it whilst he was standing with his arm leaning against a chimney-piece. The book so strongly seized his attention, that he was not able to lay it down till he had finished it, and on attempting to move, he found his arm totally benumbed. Being then unacquainted with the author, it was natural that he should wish to see and converse with him. That opportunity occurred some time after, for when Johnson lived in Castle Street, Cavendish Square, he used frequently to visit two ladies who lived opposite to Mr. Reynolds, and were well known to him. These were the daughters of Admiral Cottrell; and, at their house, Johnson and Reynolds casually met. The latter had, as already observed, conceived a very high idea of Johnson's powers of writing, nor was he less pleased with his conversation; he therefore resolved to cultivate his acquaintance, with the laudable zeal of one who was desirous of general improvement. Reynolds, at this first interview, happened fortunately to make a remark, which was so much above the common-place style of conversation, that Johnson at once perceived in him a faculty of thinking for himself. The ladies were regretting the death of a friend to whom they

owed great obligations ; upon which Reynolds observed, " Then you have the comfort, at least, of being relieved from the burthen of gratitude." They were shocked a little at this alleviating suggestion, as too selfish ; but Johnson defended it in his clear and forcible manner, and was much pleased with the mind, the fair view of human nature which it exhibited, like some of the reflexions of Rochefoucault. The consequence was that he went home and supped with Reynolds.

Not long after this, when they were together one evening at the same house, the Duchess of Argyle, and another lady of quality, came in to visit the Miss Cottrells ; and Johnson thinking that he and his friend were slighted as low company, after waiting in sullen silence a considerable time for a turn in the conversation, suddenly exclaimed, " Pray, Mr. Reynolds, how much do you think you and I could get in a week, if we were to work as hard as we could?" This was perfectly characteristic of Johnson, whose impatient temper could ill brook being treated with the semblance of contempt from any, and who, least of all things, could endure being shut out of conversation by ladies.

The celebrity acquired by Reynolds was now so great that he had from five to seven sitters daily, some of whom would come to his house at six o'clock in the morning. When he resided in St. Martin's Lane, his prices were, for a three-quarter

size, ten ; a half-length, twenty ; and for a whole length, forty guineas : but on his removal to Newport Street, he raised his charge to twelve guineas for a head, twenty-four for a half, and forty-eight guineas for a full size portrait. Such, however, was the rapid increase of his fame and business, that, at the beginning of 1758, according to a letter of Johnson, he raised his price for a head to twenty guineas ; to which two years afterwards he added another five ; in 1770 his charge was thirty-five guineas ; not long after which he made a further advance to forty, and before he quitted the pencil, his price was sixty guineas for a head, and the other sizes in proportion. It was not to be expected that the success of Reynolds should escape the malevolence of envy ; and accordingly, they who could not rival him in art, endeavoured to depreciate his merit, by undervaluing that department of painting in which he excelled all his contemporaries at home and abroad.

The calumniators are now forgotten, but that such existed is evident, from the admirable defence of portraiture, and the elegant compliment paid to Reynolds, contained in the forty-fifth number of the *Idler*, by Dr. Johnson. " There is in many minds," says that excellent writer, " a kind of vanity exerted to the disadvantage of themselves ; a desire to be praised for superior acuteness, discovered only in the degradation of their species, or censure of their country. Defamation is suffi-

ciently copious. The general lampooner of mankind may find long exercise for his zeal or wit in the defects of nature, the vexations of life, the follies of opinion, and the corruptions of practice. But fiction is easier than discernment; and most of these writers spare themselves the labour of inquiry, and exhaust their virulence upon imaginary crimes, which, as they never existed, can never be mended.

“That the painters find no encouragement among the English for many other works than portraits, has been imputed to national selfishness. ’Tis vain, says the satirist, to set before any Englishman the scenes of landscapes or the heroes of history; nature and antiquity are nothing in his eye; he has no value but for himself, nor desires any copy but of his own form. Whoever is delighted with his own picture, must derive his pleasure from the pleasure of another. Every man is always present to himself, and has, therefore, little need of his own resemblance; nor can desire it, but for the sake of those whom he loves, and by whom he hopes to be remembered. This use of the art is a natural and reasonable consequence of affection; and though, like other human actions, it is often complicated with pride, yet even such pride is more laudable than that by which palaces are covered with pictures, that, however excellent, neither imply the owners’ virtue nor excite it. Genius is chiefly exerted in

historical pictures, and the art of the painter of portraits is often lost in the obscurity of his subject. But it is in painting as in life, what is greatest is not always best. I should grieve to see Reynolds transfer to heroes and to goddesses, to empty splendour and to airy fiction, that art which is now employed in diffusing friendship, in reviving tenderness, in quickening the affections of the absent, and continuing the presence of the dead."

There can be little doubt that the former part of this paper was aimed at Hogarth, who is well known to have beheld the rising genius of Reynolds with extreme jealousy; a striking proof of which he gave in exalting Francis Cotes above that great artist as a portrait painter.

The favour rendered by Johnson to Reynolds, was amply repaid by the latter, in three papers written for the Idler at the close of the same year. The subjects of these interesting essays are, No. 76, "False Criticism on Painting:" No. 79, "The Grand Style of Painting:" and No. 82, "The true Idea of Beauty." In the first of these papers, a critic who judges every thing by a set of rules, is described with great force of humour, which would apply equally well to pedantry in other arts as well as painting. The second essay is more of an original character, and examines the maxim of imitating nature with great acuteness; and, in a true spirit of philosophical discrimination, shows that

there is a sublimity in painting as well as in poetry ; of which Michel Angelo, who is called the Homer of the art, is adduced as an example. The principle of the third essay is this, that the works of nature, if one species be compared with another, are all equally beautiful ; that the preference of one to the other is the effect of custom, or the association of ideas ; and, that in creatures of the same kind, beauty is the medium or centre of all various forms. The ingenuity of the paper cannot be denied, but that it is paradoxical and fallacious, will easily appear to him who has read the admirable disquisition of Burke on the same subject, in which that great writer has very clearly shown, that beauty does not depend upon any thing so capricious and uncertain as comparison, but that it is a quality inherent in bodies acting mechanically upon the mind by the senses. It would seem, that at this time these two great men were strangers to each other, and that the treatise of Burke was then unknown to Reynolds ; who, we are told, wrote these papers at a very short notice. Soon after this respectable appearance as an author, which was in conjunction with the two Wartons, under the broad banner of Johnson, Mr. Reynolds found it expedient to remove from Newport Street to a more convenient house in Leicester Fields, where he continued for the remainder of his life. It was at this period that he painted

the portrait of Lord Ligonier on horseback, a performance that may very fairly be placed in competition with the noble equestrian figure of Charles the First, at Blenheim, which is one of the finest pictures in that kind, of Vandyck. Such now was the influx of his business, that he found it necessary to keep a list of the names of those who waited, and to take them in the order there set down. Many of these portraits were even sent home before they were dry. We are told that he kept a portfolio in his painting room, containing all the prints that had been engraved from his portraits ; so that those who came to sit had this collection to look over ; and if they fixed on any particular attitude, he would repeat it precisely, both in regard to drapery and position, which greatly facilitated the execution, and gave little trouble. He now kept several assistants employed to paint the draperies, the principal of whom were Peter Toms and Marchi. Of the apparatus of this great artist, when he settled in Leicester Fields, we have the following account, by one who resided with him some years. The painting room was octagonal, about twenty feet in length by about sixteen in breadth ; the light was received from a square window, of a moderate size ; the chair for the sitters, which was raised a foot and a half from the floor, turned upon castors : the palette used by our artist was held by

a handle, and the sticks of his pencils were remarkable for their length, which no doubt contributed very much to the force of his portraits.

The same year that Mr. Reynolds removed to Leicester Fields, an exhibition was opened by the artists, at a large room in the Strand, belonging to the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce. Hither Reynolds sent four of his pictures, which attracted general admiration. The next exhibition, which was in a spacious room in Spring Gardens, contained, among other of his pictures, his fine one of Lord Ligonier, and a portrait of Sterne. On the former occasion the catalogue was considered as a ticket which entitled a whole company to admission; but much inconvenience and confusion having risen from this, an alteration was adopted the next year, by demanding one shilling from each visitor, who received a catalogue gratis. The reasons of this change, and the design of the institution itself were laid before the public in an admirable address written by Johnson; which, as connected with the history of the arts at that interesting period, deserves a place in this memoir.

“The public may justly require to be informed of the nature and extent of every design for which the favour of the public is openly solicited. The artists, who were themselves the first promoters of an exhibition in this nation, and who have now contributed to the following catalogue, think

it therefore necessary to explain their purpose, and justify their conduct. An exhibition of the works of art being a spectacle new in the kingdom, has raised various opinions and conjectures among those who are unacquainted with the practice of foreign nations. Those who set their performances to general view, have too often been considered the rivals of each other; as men actuated, if not by avarice, at least by vanity, and contending for superiority of fame, though not for a pecuniary prize. It cannot be denied or doubted, that all who offer themselves to criticism are desirous of praise: this desire is not only innocent but virtuous, while it is undebased by artifice, and unpolluted by envy; and of envy or artifice those men can never be accused, who, already enjoying all the honours and profits of their profession, are content to stand candidates for public notice with genius yet unexperienced, and diligence yet unrewarded; who, without any hope of increasing their own reputation or interest, expose their names and their works, only that they may furnish an opportunity of appearance to the young, the diffident, and the neglected. The purpose of this exhibition is not to enrich the artist, but to advance the art; the eminent are not flattered with preference, nor the obscure insulted with contempt: whoever hopes to deserve public favour, is here invited to display his merit. Of the price put upon this exhibition, some account may be de-

manded. Whoever sets his works to be shown, naturally desires a multitude of spectators; but his desire defeats its own end, when spectators assemble in such numbers as to obstruct one another.

“ Though we are far from wishing to diminish the pleasures, or depreciate the sentiments of any class of the community, we know, however, what every one knows, that all cannot be judges or purchasers of works of art. Yet we have already found, by experience, that all are desirous to see an exhibition. When the terms of admission were low, the room was thronged with such multitudes as made access dangerous, and frightened away those whose approbation was most desired. Yet, because it is seldom believed that money is got but for the love of money, we shall tell the use which we intend to make of our expected profits. Many artists of great abilities are unable to sell their works for their due price: to remove this inconvenience, an annual sale will be appointed, to which every man may send his works, and them, if he will, without his name. Those works will be reviewed by the committee that conduct the exhibition; a price will be secretly set on every piece, and registered by the secretary; if the piece exposed is sold for more, the whole price shall be the artist's; but if the purchasers value it at less than the committee, the artist shall

be paid the deficiency from the profits of the exhibition."

In 1762 Mr. Reynolds produced his celebrated picture of Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy, for which the Earl of Halifax gave three hundred guineas, though it was afterwards sold to the late Mr. Angerstein for two hundred and fifty. In the autumn of the same year, he made an excursion into Devonshire, accompanied by his friend Johnson, receiving every-where the respect due to brilliant talents, and which were rendered still greater by personal virtue. During the stay of the two friends at Plymouth, they were entertained by Dr. John Mudge, then an eminent surgeon, and afterwards no less distinguished as a physician in that town; a man of science and worth, to whom, as well as to his whole family, Reynolds was much attached; of which soon after his return to London he gave a very affectionate proof. Dr. Mudge had a son in the Navy Office, then about sixteen years of age; and a frequent visitor at the house of Mr. Reynolds, who wishing to gratify the father, drew the portrait of the young gentleman, who was represented as suddenly discovering himself by drawing aside a curtain, and looking out of the canvass by way of surprising his friends. This picture, we are informed, may be deemed one of the happiest productions of the artist. At the beginning of 1764,

Reynolds and Johnson instituted the "Literary Club," which at first consisted only of twelve members, the others being Goldsmith, Nugent, Burke, Dr. Percy, Sir Robert Chambers, Sir John Hawkins, Bennet Langton, Anthony Chamier, Samuel Dyer, and Topham Beauclerk; but afterwards the number increased and became indefinite. The same year was rendered remarkable by the royal incorporation of the artists of Great Britain, of which chartered Society Mr. Reynolds was chosen a director. In the exhibition of the following season he produced a charming picture of Lady Sarah Bunbury sacrificing to the Graces; an whole length of Lady Elizabeth Keppel; and another of Lady Waldegrave. The same year he again figured as an author and critic in some notes communicated to Dr. Johnson for his edition of Shakspeare; a literary association which reminds one of the friendship of Erasmus and Hans Holbein, with only this exception, that the modern painter far exceeded the German in the power of art as well as in the extent of learning. As a specimen of the acumen of Reynolds in the capacity of an illustrator of Shakspeare, we may take his remarks on the colloquy between the King and Banquo, in Macbeth:

*" King. This castle hath a pleasant seat ; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.*

**“ Ban. This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
By his lov'd mansionry, that the heavens' breath
Smells wooingly. Here is no jetty frieze,
Buttress, nor coigne of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendant bed, and procreant cradle :
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed
The air is delicate.”**

The note of Reynolds is as follows : “ This short dialogue between Duncan and Banquo, whilst they are approaching the gates of Macbeth's castle, has always appeared to me a striking instance of what in painting is termed *repose*. This conversation very naturally turns upon the beauty of its situation and the pleasantness of the air ; and Banquo, observing the martlets' nests in every recess of the cornice, remarks, that where those birds most breed and haunt, the air is delicate. The subject of quiet and easy conversation gives that repose so necessary to the mind, after the tumultuous bustle of the preceding scenes, and perfectly contrasts the scene of horror that immediately succeeds. It seems as if Shakspeare asked himself, what is a prince likely to say to his attendants on such an occasion ? Whereas the modern writers seem, on the contrary, to be always scenting for new thoughts, such as would never occur to men in the situation which is represented. This also is frequently the practice of

Homer, who, from the midst of battles and horrors, relieves and refreshes the mind of the reader, by introducing some quiet rural image, or picture of familiar domestic life."

It might have been expected, that when the artists became associated by a royal charter, something like unity and emulation would have prevailed in the new company. But this was not the case, and though Reynolds was a nominal member of the society, he took no other share in its transactions than that of supporting the annual exhibitions, which he justly considered as best calculated to promote the true spirit of the art. He seems from the beginning to have foreseen the dissensions which took place among his brethren, and therefore very wisely resolved to keep aloof, that he might not be embroiled in party disputes, to which he had a natural aversion. At length, to put an end to these conflicts, a scheme was set on foot in 1768, to found a Royal Academy, similar to the establishments in foreign countries. The four persons who first planned the institution were Sir William Chambers, Mr. West, Mr. Cotes, and Mr. Moser; and they carried on the project with such profound secrecy, that not one of the Incorporated Society had the least knowledge or idea of it; insomuch that even Mr. Kirby, their president, assured them from the chair, that his Majesty intended to patronise them, and also to visit their

exhibition. In the mean time, the four persons already mentioned, with the concurrence of some of their party, proceeded in their plan. They also made out a list of their officers, as well as of members, and inserted the name of Reynolds with the rest. This list was to be delivered to the King for his approbation; but Mr. Reynolds being unwilling to join with either party, communicated that resolution to Sir William Chambers; in consequence of which, attempts were made by Mr. Penny to persuade him to enter into the new association, but in vain. Penny then applied to Mr. West, and begged him to intercede with Reynolds, adding, that he was the only person who could influence him to give his consent. West accordingly called on him the same evening, when the whole party, amounting to about thirty, held a meeting at Mr. Wilton's house, to wait the result, as the King had appointed the following morning to receive their plan and list of officers. Mr. West remained with Reynolds above two hours, and at last prevailed on him so far, that he ordered his carriage, and went with him to Mr. Wilton's, where the assembled artists, immediately on his entrance, saluted him as their president. He was much affected by the compliment, and returned them his thanks for this mark of their approbation, but declined accepting the honour till he had consulted with Dr. Johnson and Mr. Burke. This greatly

disappointed the company, as they were expected to be with the king the next morning by appointment; but West and Cotes avoided going to his Majesty, since they could not present him with a complete list of their directors, for the want of a president. A fortnight elapsed before Mr. Reynolds gave his consent, the reason of which delay was, as he told West, that he had been informed from the very best authority, their scheme would come to nothing, and was a mere delusion, having received the information from Mr. Kirby himself, who assured him that the King had declared his intention of countenancing and protecting the Incorporated Society, and also to visit their exhibition. It was about this time that Mr. West had finished his picture of Regulus, which was painted by command of the King, and on the morning appointed by his Majesty he went with it to the palace to show it to his royal patron. Whilst the King was contemplating the picture, with Mr. West in the room, a page came to say that Mr. Kirby was waiting for his Majesty's commands. He was immediately sent for, and on his entrance the King directed his attention to the picture, asking his opinion of it; Mr. Kirby commended it much, and wished to know by whom it was painted; upon which the King pointed to Mr. West as the artist. Kirby then observed that such a work ought to be seen by the public, and hoped his Majesty would permit it to be in the exhibition of the Incorporated

Society of Artists. The King answered, that it was his pleasure the picture should be exhibited, but that it would most certainly be at the exhibition of his own Royal Academy. At these words poor Kirby appeared thunder-struck; for it was the first confirmation he had received of the report, which before he considered as unworthy of unbelief.

All obstacles were now, of course, removed: Mr. Reynolds was elected to the chair without one dissentient voice, and on waiting upon his Majesty he received the honour of knighthood, a distinction which gave such satisfaction to his friend Johnson, that, though the Doctor had not tasted wine for some years, he, upon this occasion, broke through his rule of abstemiousness.

The members of the Royal Academy first met for business on the 10th of December, 1768; but the public opening of it did not take place till New Year's Day, when the president delivered an appropriate discourse from the chair, in which he laid down some general rules for students, and concluded with expressing his hope that the institution would answer the expectation of the Royal Founder; that the present age might vie in arts with that of Leo X.; and that the dignity of the dying art, to use the expression of Pliny, might be revived under the reign of George III. This discourse gave such satisfaction, that, at the request of the hearers, it was printed soon after. It was no part of the official duty of the president

to pronounce discourses either to the members or students; but Sir Joshua reflecting upon the state of the art, and knowing how necessary it was that aspiring genius should be directed to the adoption of sound principles, voluntarily imposed this task upon himself for the benefit of young artists, who could hardly be expected, without assistance, to steer clear of errors sanctioned by great names, or to avoid falling into imbecility of manner by imitating bad models. Actuated solely by the desire to see a British School rising on the royal foundation, now so auspiciously laid, Sir Joshua, therefore, undertook his part of the great work, not only by exhibiting the productions of his own pencil, but by communicating to the academy the result of his observations and experience, as a guide to others in that course which he had himself so gloriously pursued. It is very evident, that the fifteen academical Discourses which he delivered from the chair, must have cost him much labour, considering that his avocations rarely permitted him to indulge even in correspondence. Hence it was, perhaps, that many, knowing how much he was employed in painting, could not bring themselves to believe that these Discourses were entirely of his own composition; and some, who boasted quicker penetration than others, affected to discern the hand of Johnson in them, but with what truth, we may learn from the declaration of the president himself, in an unfinished sketch of

another professional address, which he intended to have delivered from the chair, but was prevented by his last illness : " Whatever merit," says he, " the Discourses, which I have had the honour of delivering from this place, may have, must be imputed, in a great measure, to the education which I may be said to have had under Dr. Johnson. I do not mean to say, though it certainly would be to the credit of these Discourses if I could say it with truth, that he contributed even a single sentiment to them ; but he qualified my mind to think justly."

There were others again, who fancied that Burke materially assisted him on these occasions ; but there is even less appearance of that great man's style in the Discourses than of Johnson's ; though it is not improbable that Sir Joshua consulted both of these intimate friends before he ventured either to pronounce or to print his orations. One thing, however, may be depended upon, though it has not been noticed by any of his former biographers, that the dedication of the collected Discourses to the King, in 1778, was the sole production of Dr. Johnson.

Those persons who thought Reynolds unequal to the style of composition exhibited in these classical performances, might safely have been referred, for the correction of their judgment, to his papers in the *Idler*, the *Memoranda* of his *Pictorial Tours*, and his *Notes to Du Fresnoy's Poem on Painting*. Of

the various merits of these academical Discourses it is needless here to speak. They have received the public approbation of all who possess a taste refined from prejudice, and there can be no doubt of their having also had the intended effect of leading genius above the mechanism of art. They have, in short, the singular merit of rendering instruction agreeable without pedantry, and of giving pleasantness to criticism by divesting it of technical affectation.

Indefatigable as Reynolds was in his profession, he was fond of company, and though his deafness might have been supposed to have rendered conversation irksome to him, no man enjoyed it more, or profited by it better. He kept a most hospitable table, and he belonged to different associations, in which 'the feast of reason' was preserved amidst conviviality. One of these clubs was held at the St. James's Coffee House, and consisted, among others, of Dr. Johnson, Dr. Barnard, Dr. Douglas, Garrick, Goldsmith, the two Burkes, and Sir Joshua. Here Garrick, one evening, proposed writing extemporaneous epitaphs upon each other, and by way of beginning, composed some ludicrous lines characteristic of Goldsmith. This occasioned the celebrated poem of the "Retaliation," in which Goldsmith sketched the portraits of his compeers with much effect and considerable humour. Though that of Sir Joshua is well known, it cannot properly be omitted in the present memoir.

" Here Reynolds is laid ; and to tell you my mind,
 He has not left a better or wiser behind ;
 His pencil was striking, resistless, and grand ;
 His manners were gentle, complying, and bland ;
 Still born to improve us in every part,
 His pencil our faces, his manners our heart ;
 To coxcombs averse, yet most civilly steering,
 When they judged without skill he was still hard of
 hearing ;
 When they talk'd of their Raffaelles, Corregios, and stuff,
 He shifted his trumpet, and only took snuff !"

Just before this, that pleasant humourist, Caleb
 Whitefoord, who had been introduced into the
 club by Sir Joshua, indulged his sportive vein by
 writing two epitaphs on Goldsmith and Cumber-
 land, which gave such mortal offence to them that
 the satirist deemed it most prudent not to attend
 the next meeting. Being loth, however, to remain
 at variance with any of his friends, he sent the
 following epistle to Sir Joshua, supplicating his
 mediatorship :—

Admire not, dear knight,
 That I keep out of sight,
 Consider what perils await him,
 Who with ill-season'd jokes
 Indiscreetly provokes
 The *genus irritabile vatum*.

I felt, when these swains
 Rehears'd their sweet strains,
 That mine had too much lemon-juice ;
 And strove to conceal,
 For the general weal,
 What at last I was forc'd to produce.

After such panegyric,
The least thing satiric,
Must throw both the bards in the twitters ;
'Twas impossible they,
After drinking Tokay,
Could relish a bumper of bitters.

Do talk to each bard,
Beg they won't be too hard,
But be merciful as they are stout ;
I rely on your skill,
Say just what you will,
And as you brought me in, bring me out.

To the company too,
Some apology's due,
I know you can do it with ease ;
Be it yours, sir, to place,
In the *best light* my case,
And give it what *colour* you please.

For those brats of my brain,
Which have caus'd so much pain,
Henceforth I renounce and disown 'em ;
And still keep in sight,
When I epitaphs write,
DE MORTUIS NIL NISI BONUM !

The good offices of Sir Joshua were not withheld on this occasion, and at his friendly table peace was restored between all the parties. About the same time another difference arose between Johnson and Dr. Barnard, the Dean of Derry ; on which the latter wrote also a poetical epistle to Sir Joshua, upon whom he passed this elegant compliment :—

Dear knight of Plympton, tell me how
To suffer with unruffled brow,
And smile serene like thine ;
The jest uncouth, or truth severe,
To such I'll turn my deafest ear,
And calmly drink my wine.

Thou say'st, not only skill is gain'd,
But genius too may be attain'd
By studious imitation,
Thy temper mild, thy genius fine,
I'll copy, till I make them mine
By constant application.

In 1773 Sir Joshua Reynolds received a mark of distinction which gratified him exceedingly, that of being elected Mayor of his native town ; whither he repaired, of course, to be inaugurated in due form. On this occasion he presented his portrait to the corporation, by whom it was placed in their town-hall ; but the distich, written purposely to be placed under it, by the Reverend Thomas Alcock, was considered by Sir Joshua as bordering too much upon hyperbolic extravagance to be inserted with his knowledge, and in his life time. It was as follows :—

*Laudat Romanus Raphaelem, Græcus Apellem,
Plympton Reynolden jactat, utrique parem.*

Soon after his return from Devonshire, Sir Joshua casually meeting the King in Richmond Gardens, was congratulated by his Majesty on his election, at which the Knight felt much surprised, little thinking that such a circumstance could have

reached the ears of royalty. Sir Joshua answered, that it was an honour which gave him more pleasure than any he had ever received in his life ; “ except,” added he, “ that which your Majesty was graciously pleased to confer upon me.”

Another mark of distinction which he received this year was that of the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, from the University of Oxford, and it was not a little flattering to him to have this academical honour at the same time with Dr. Beattie. Soon after this, Sir Joshua, who had the greatest esteem for Dr. Beattie, painted a very remarkable picture of him, in which he is represented with his volume on Truth under his arm, an Angel going before him, and dispersing a host of errors, headed by Voltaire. This allegorical portrait excited much notice, but gave great offence to Goldsmith, who said, “ It very ill becomes a man of your eminence and character, Sir Joshua, to condescend to be a mean flatterer, or to wish to degrade so high a genius as Voltaire before so mean a writer as Dr. Beattie ; for Dr. Beattie, and his book together, will, in the space of ten years, not be known ever to have been in existence ; but your allegorical picture, and the fame of Voltaire, will live for ever, to your disgrace as a flatterer.”

Poor Goldsmith was, ~~in this instance~~, as in most others, solely actuated by envy ; for the honour bestowed upon any living writer always proved to him a sting of torment. The present was

not the only time that he vented his spleen against Beattie; but he received a most severe retort from Johnson whenever he presumed to do so in his company. Once, when Beattie happened to be mentioned with respect on account of his work, Goldsmith could not help exclaiming, "Here is much ado about a man who has written a single book; and I have published so many!" "Ah, Goldy," said Johnson, "remember, there are forty-two sixpences in a guinea." Of this admirable picture Sir Joshua was pleased to make Dr. Beattie a present, of which he was justly proud, preserving it with the utmost care, and keeping it always covered with a green silk curtain.

Dr. Beattie, in his Diary, says, "August 16, 1773, breakfasted with Sir Joshua Reynolds, who this day began the allegorical picture. I sat to him five hours, in which time he finished my head, and sketched out the rest of my figure. The likeness is most striking, and the execution most masterly. The figure is as large as life. The plan is not yet fixed for the rest of the picture. Though I sat five hours, I was not in the least fatigued; for by placing a large mirror opposite to my face, Sir Joshua Reynolds put it in my power to see every stroke of his pencil; and I was greatly entertained to observe the progress of the work, and the easy and masterly manner of the artist, which differs as much from that of all the others I have seen at work, as the execution of Giardini on the violin

differs from that of a common fiddler." In another place the doctor has this character of Sir Joshua : " I find him to be a man, not only of excellent taste in painting and poetry, but of an enlarged understanding and truly philosophical mind. His notions of painting are not at all the same with those that are entertained by the generality of painters, and others : artificial and contrasted attitudes, and groupes, he makes no account of ; it is the truth and simplicity of nature which he is ambitious to imitate ; and these, it must be allowed, he possesses the art of blending with the most exquisite grace and the most animated expression. He speaks with contempt of those who suppose grace to consist in erect position, turned-out toes, or the frippery of modern dress. Indeed, whatever account we make of the colouring of this great artist (which some people object to), it is impossible to deny him the praise of being the greatest designer of any age. In his pictures there is a grace, a variety, an expression, a simplicity, which I have never seen in the works of any other painter. His portraits are distinguished from all others by this, that they exhibit an exact imitation, not only of the features, but also of the character represented."

Another, and still more celebrated picture than the allegorical one of Beattie, painted by Sir Joshua in this year, was that of Count Ugolino, taken from the terrible story of that chief's misfor-

tunes, in the *Comedia* of Dante. The idea of this exquisite piece was suggested to Sir Joshua by Burke, on casually observing an old emaciated head in his painting room; which, he observed, struck him as being the precise person, countenance, and expression, of the Count Ugolino described by Dante. The picture, when finished, was exhibited, and afterwards sold to the Duke of Dorset for four hundred guineas. About this time a plan was formed by the principal members of the Royal Academy, to ornament the chapel of old Somerset house, which had recently been given to the Society by the King, with a series of historical pictures; but Sir Joshua Reynolds improved the idea, by saying, "they should fly at higher game, and undertake St. Paul's cathedral." This proposal was readily acceded to, and a negotiation took place with Dr. Newton, Bishop of Bristol and Dean of St. Paul's, who most heartily gave his consent, and thus there appeared no obstacle to the magnificent design. An obstacle, however, there was; for whether Dr. Terrick, the Bishop, was piqued at not having been first consulted, or whether he really entertained what he professed, a dread of popery, so it was that he put a negative upon the scheme altogether, and would not even suffer a monument to be erected within the metropolitical church. Had the plan been suffered to proceed, Sir Joshua intended to have painted the Virgin and Infant Saviour in the Manger; but

the subjects proposed by the other artists, who were West, Barry, Dance, Cipriani, and Kauffman, have not been mentioned. On the failure of this scheme another was taken up, of ornamenting the rooms of the Society of Arts with historical and allegorical paintings. At first Sir Joshua gave his assent, but as it was intended that an exhibition should take place to remunerate the artists, he declined going any further, and then the work was undertaken and executed by Barry.

In April, 1774, the world lost that ingenious writer, but eccentric character, Oliver Goldsmith, an event which so much affected Sir Joshua, that he did not touch his pencil for the whole day. He acted as executor on that melancholy occasion, and very prudently caused the body to be interred privately in the Temple burying-ground, observing, that it would be more prudent to apply what money could be procured by subscription, to the erecting of a lasting memorial of his deceased friend, than in a pompous funeral, which would be soon forgotten. He afterwards went himself to the Abbey, and fixed upon the place where the monument was erected, and one better adapted for the purpose could not have been found in that structure.

To the numerous honours conferred upon Reynolds, was added, about this time, that of being elected a member of the Imperial Academy of Florence, on which occasion he sent thither, for the gallery, his portrait, with a Latin inscription, on

a pannel of mahogany, which appears to have been written by Johnson, from the concluding line, where, in allusion to Sir Joshua's civic dignity, it is said that he was *PREFECTUS JUSTITIARII MORUMQUE CENSOR*.

In 1779 Sir Joshua gave his talents to the Royal Academy, by ornamenting the ceiling of their library with an allegorical painting, representing Theory sitting on a Cloud; besides which, there are also of his hand, in the same building, two portraits of their late Majesties, and one of Sir William Chambers.

Sir Joshua was now very much employed in carrying into effect the commission with which he was entrusted, of preparing designs for ornamenting the chapel of New College, Oxford. The members of that society at first intended to have all the windows of their chapel painted with sacred subjects; but Sir Joshua, on a personal survey of the building, saw so much space and beauty in that over the west entrance, as made him desirous of confining the whole to that part alone, instead of breaking his design, and destroying its effect by distribution. His reasons for this plan he thus detailed in a letter to the parties most interested in the work:—"Supposing this scheme to take place, my idea is to paint, in the great space in the centre, Christ in the Manger, on the principle that Corregio has done it, in the famous picture called the *NOTTE*, making all the light proceed from

Christ. These tricks of the art, as they may be called, seem to be more properly adapted to glass painting than any other kind. This middle space will be filled with the Virgin, Christ, Joseph, and Angels; the two smaller spaces on each side I shall fill with the Shepherds coming to worship; and the seven divisions below with the figures of Faith, Hope, Charity, and the four Cardinal Virtues, which will make a proper rustic base, or foundation, for the support of the Christian religion. Upon the whole, it appears to me, that chance has presented to us materials so well adapted to our purpose, that if we had the whole window of our own invention and contrivance, we should not probably have succeeded better." In the execution of this plan he met with the fullest co-operation of the learned Society by whom he was employed; and the manner in which the mechanical process was performed by Mr. Jervis of Dublin, gave great satisfaction to Sir Joshua, who introduced his portrait, as well as his own, among the shepherds. For the original design of the grand central picture of the Nativity, the late Duke of Rutland gave twelve hundred guineas.

In the summer of 1781, Sir Joshua made a tour on the Continent, accompanied by his friend Mr. Metcalf, with the intention of examining the principal performances of the Dutch and Flemish schools. While at Antwerp, Sir Joshua took notice of a young man named De Gree, who pos-

sessed some talents for painting, but was then in an impoverished state, his father being a taylor in mean circumstances. Sir Joshua gave him encouragement to come to England, received him here with his wonted kindness, and would have persuaded him to settle in the metropolis; but De Gree having formed an engagement with Mr. Latouche, of Dublin, excused himself on that account: and Sir Joshua, instead of being displeased, presented him with fifty guineas to bear his expenses; which sum, however, the young man sent over to his aged parents at Antwerp.

At the beginning of 1783, the Royal Academy lost one of its first and most valuable members, Mr. Moser; of whom the president drew up this character, which exhibits the merits of the eulogist as well as of his deceased friend.

“ January 24, 1783.

“ Yesterday died at his apartments in Somerset Place, George Michael Moser, keeper of the Royal Academy; aged seventy-eight years. He was a native of Switzerland, but came to England very young, to follow the profession of a chaser in gold, in which art he has always been considered as holding the first rank. But his skill was not confined to this alone; he possessed an universal knowledge in all branches of painting and sculpture, which perfectly qualified him for the place that he held in the academy, the business of which

principally consists in superintending and instructing the students who draw or model from the antique figures.

“ His private character deserves a more ample testimony than this transient memorial. Few have passed a more inoffensive, or, perhaps, a more happy life ; if happiness, or enjoyment of life, consists in having the mind always occupied, always intent upon some useful art, by which fame and distinction may be acquired. Mr. Moser’s whole attention was absorbed, either in practice, or something that related to the advancement of art. He may truly be said, in every sense, to have been the father of the present race of artists ; for long before the Royal Academy was established, he presided over the little societies which met first in Salisbury Court, and afterwards in St. Martin’s Lane, where they drew from living models. Perhaps nothing that can be said will more strongly imply his amiable disposition, than that all the different societies with which he has been connected, have always turned their eyes upon him for their treasurer and chief manager ; when, perhaps, they would not have contentedly submitted to any other authority. His early society was composed of men whose names are well known in the world ; such as Hogarth, Rysbrack, Ronbilliac, Wills, Ellis, and Vanderbank. Though he had outlived all the companions of his youth, he might, to the last, have boasted of a succession

equally numerous; for all that knew him were his friends.

“ When he was appointed keeper of the Royal Academy, his conduct was exemplary, and worthy to be imitated by whoever shall succeed him in that office. As he loved the employment of teaching, he could not fail of discharging that duty with diligence. By the propriety of his conduct he united the love and respect of the students; he kept in order the academy, and made himself respected, without the austerity or importance of office; all noise and tumult immediately ceased on his appearance; at the same time, there was nothing forbidding in his manner, which might restrain his pupils from freely applying to him for advice or assistance. All this excellence had a firm foundation: he was a man of sincere and ardent piety, and has left an illustrious example of the exactness with which the subordinate duties may be expected to be discharged by him whose first care is to please God. He has left one daughter behind him, who has distinguished herself by the admirable manner in which she paints and composes pieces of flowers, of which many samples have been seen in the exhibitions. She has had the honour of being much employed in this way by their Majesties, and for her extraordinary merit has been received into the Royal Academy.”

In the summer of this year Sir Joshua made another trip to the Continent, to examine the pictures which, by the suppression of some of the monasteries in the Netherlands, were about to be exposed to sale. His principal attention at Antwerp and Brussels was directed to the works of Rubens, on viewing which, this second time, they appeared, as he said, much less brilliant than on the former inspection. He was at a loss to account for this circumstance, till, on recollecting that when he first saw them he had his note book in his hand for the purpose of writing down his remarks, he perceived what had occasioned their now making a less impression in this respect than they had formerly done. As by the transition of the eye from the white paper to the picture, the colours derived uncommon richness and warmth; so, for want of that foil, they afterwards appeared cold. It was observable, that on his return from Flanders, the portraits which he painted till his secession from practice, possessed more animation, force, and brilliancy than any of his former works, which was accounted for by his admiration of the performances of Rubens; some of the best of which, with pictures by other masters, he added to his gallery when the sale took place in 1785.

He now again appeared before the public as an author, or commentator, in professional notes

appended to his friend Mason's translation of Du Fresnoy's Poem on the Art of Painting.

On the death of Mr. Allan Ramsay, in 1784, Sir Joshua was sworn as principal painter in ordinary to the King, and on St. Luke's day, the same year, he was entertained at the Hall of the Painter-Stainers' Company, having been presented with the freedom thereof, at the desire of Mr. Charles Catton, who was a member of the Royal Academy. Soon after this Sir Joshua sustained a great loss in the death of his old friend, Dr. Samuel Johnson, who appointed him one of the executors of his last will, and bequeathed to him, as memorials of his affectionate regard, the great French Dictionary of Moreri, and the revised copy of his own folio Dictionary of the English Language. Some months previous to the Doctor's dissolution, Sir Joshua took an active part in endeavouring to procure an increase of his pension, that he might be enabled to proceed to the South of France and Italy, for the re-establishment of his health; but the design failed, and indeed considering the age of the invalid, and the broken state of his constitution, by a complication of disorders, the basis of which was hydropic, the wonder is how an idea of restoring him to health by any means could ever have been entertained. The zeal shown by his friends on this occasion, however, did them great honour, and evinced the

high estimation in which that extraordinary man was held by those who had the best opportunities of judging of his worth.

In 1786, Sir Joshua Reynolds received a commission from the Empress Catherine of Russia, to paint for her an historical picture, the subject, size, and price of which were all left to himself. Thus set at full liberty, he found a difficulty in coming to a determination; and we are told by one who ought to know, that he first thought of taking the story of Queen Elizabeth at the Camp of Tilbury for his subject, but, that upon farther consideration he relinquished it for something emblematical of the great princess by whom he was employed. He therefore chose the Infant Hercules strangling the Serpents in the Cradle, as an appropriate figure of the great task which the empress had undergone in the civilisation of her mighty empire, and of the obstacles she had to surmount in the accomplishment of so arduous an enterprise. This grand composition he executed in his very best manner, and it may safely stand in competition with any historical painting that has appeared since the days of Rubens. In this picture is introduced the blind prophet Tiresias, which Sir Joshua used to say he intended as a representation of his deceased friend Johnson, whom he had often contemplated in that attitude.

This noble painting was sent to St. Petersburg, with two sets of Sir Joshua's Discourses, one in

English, and the other in French, in 1789; and early in the following year, the Russian Ambassador, Count Woronzow, waited upon Sir Joshua, and delivered to him a gold box, having the portrait of the Empress on the lid, set with large diamonds. This present was accompanied by the following letter, in the hand-writing of the Empress :

“ I have read, and, I may say, with the greatest avidity, those Discourses pronounced at the Royal Academy of London, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, which that illustrious artist sent me with his large picture ; in both productions one may easily trace a most elevated genius. I recommend to you to give my thanks to Sir Joshua, and to remit him the box I send, as a testimony of the great satisfaction the perusal of his Discourses has given me; and which I look upon as, perhaps, the best work that was ever written upon the subject. My portrait, which is on the cover of the box, is of a composition made at my Hermitage, where they are now at work about impressions on the stones found there. I expect you will inform me of the price of the large picture, on the subject of which I have already spoke to you in another letter.”

The portrait here mentioned was a basso-relievo of her Majesty, and the executors of Sir Joshua afterwards received fifteen hundred guineas for the

picture; of which there is a fine engraving in mezzotinto by Hodges.

When the late Alderman John Boydell projected the plan of his Shakspeare, one of the first persons thought of to illustrate that splendid work was the president of the Royal Academy; but on being applied to, he declined taking any part in the concern. It has been oddly surmised, by one who ought to have known Sir Joshua better, that he was shy of forming an engagement with a printseller, which was not the fact: and the conjecture is injurious to his memory. Sir Joshua had his suspicions that the work would not keep up to what was professed, and this made him reluctant to lend his name to the undertaking. How far he was right in his apprehension, may be easily ascertained by an examination of the pictures and plates of that splendidly imposing edition.

After resisting many importunities, the rhetoric of George Steevens is said to have overcome the scruples of Sir Joshua, who painted three pictures for the Shakspeare Gallery: the first was the Cauldron scene in Macbeth; the second, Puck, in the Midsummer Night's Dream; and the third, the Death of Cardinal Beaufort, in the second part of Henry the Sixth. This last painting became the object of much hypercriticism, on account of the demon represented as couching close behind the pillow of the dying prelate, and exulting in his

agonies. This personification of a tormented conscience was condemned as an unnatural intermixture of fancy with reality, the censors forgetting, mayhap, that the artist had not engaged in painting a picture illustrative of an historical event, but of a scene in a play, where the poet had himself introduced the pious King Henry saying,

“ Oh beat away the busy meddling fiend,
That lays strong siege unto this wretch's soul !”

So that Sir Joshua here strictly confined himself to the rule,

———— similisque Poesi
Sit Pictura ———

True painting imitates the poet's lays ; by depicting on canvass the terrible imagery which the great bard had so powerfully described in his tragedy. Were the censure of the critics to be admitted in this instance, it would follow that the artist who should paint the banquetting scene in *Macbeth*, ought to represent an empty chair at the table, instead of filling it with the shade of the murdered Banquo ; for the spectral appearance in the one case is as much the creature of the imagination as in the other.

We are now arrived at an event in the life of Sir Joshua Reynolds, which excited general surprise, and occasioned, of course, a variety of observations, according to the light in which it was viewed, by those who took an interest in the

affairs of the academy. The simple facts appear to be these; that Sir Joshua, wishing to procure the professorship of perspective for Mr. Bonomi, a very ingenious Italian architect, gave his casting vote in favour of that candidate as an associate; but that, afterwards, in endeavouring to bring him in as an academician, he failed, and was outnumbered by a very large majority, who were in the interest of Mr. Fuseli. Upon the announcement of the numbers the president quitted the chair, evidently much chagrined, and soon after wrote the following letter to the secretary :—

“ SIR,

“ I beg you would inform the Council, which I understand meet this evening, with my fixed resolution of resigning the presidency of the Royal Academy, and consequently my seat as an academician. As I can no longer be of any use to the academy as president, it would be still less in my power, in a subordinate situation. I therefore now take my leave of the academy, with my sincere good wishes for its prosperity, and with all due respect to its members.

“ I am, Sir, your most humble,

“ And most obedient servant,

“ JOSHUA REYNOLDS.”

“ P. S.—Sir William Chambers has two letters of mine, either of which, or both, he is at full liberty to communicate to the Council.”

The Council felt much concern at this unpleasant occurrence; but Sir William Chambers flattered himself that, by laying the matter before the King, the difference might be healed. He did so, and obtained an interview with his Majesty, who said, "he would be happy in Sir Joshua's continuing in the president's chair." It now seemed as if harmony would have been restored; but Sir Joshua continued inflexible, and in his reply to Sir William, observed, "that he inferred his conduct must have been satisfactory to his Majesty, from the very gratifying way in which his royal pleasure had been declared; and if any inducement could make him depart from his original resolution, the will of his sovereign would prevail; but that, flattered by his Majesty's approval to the last, there could be nothing dishonourable in his resignation; and that, in addition to this determination, as he could not consistently hold the subordinate distinction of royal academician, after he had so long possessed the chair, he begged also to relinquish that honour."

Upon this another meeting was held, and a conciliatory resolution entered into, expressive of the regret of the Council at what had happened, and as they unanimously professed that no personal disrespect was intended towards Sir Joshua, they trusted he would be prevailed upon to comply with the wishes of the King, and continue in the presidency. A delegation of nine members.

waited upon Sir Joshua with this resolution, and happily succeeded in obtaining his consent to resume the chair; which, after the King's consent had been granted as a matter of form, took place.

Shortly after this restoration, Sir Joshua delivered his fifteenth Discourse to the academy, in which he displayed his wonted mental vigour, but hinted, at the same time, that, from his age and increasing infirmities, this would probably be, what it really was, his last address.

The late worthy Mr. William Gilpin having submitted to Sir Joshua for his opinion, before he printed it, his *Essay on Picturesque Beauty*, received this letter, which shows that his judgment remained as sound and penetrating as ever.

“ London, April 19, 1791.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ Though I read now but little, yet I have read with great attention the *Essay* which you were so good as to put into my hands, on the difference between the beautiful and the picturesque; and I may truly say I have received from it much pleasure and improvement.

“ Without opposing any of your sentiments, it has suggested an idea that may be worth consideration, whether the epithet *Picturesque* is not applicable to the excellence of the inferior schools, rather than to the higher. The works of Michel Angelo, Raffaelle, &c. appear to me to have

nothing of it; whereas Rubens and the Venetian painters may almost be said to have nothing else.

“ Perhaps Picturesque is somewhat synonymous to the word Taste, which we should improperly apply to Homer or to Milton, but very well to Pope or Prior. I suspect that the application of these words is to excellencies of an inferior order, and which are incompatible with the grand style.

“ You are certainly right in saying that variety in tints and form is picturesque; but it must be remembered on the other hand, that the reverse of this (uniformity of colour and a long continuation of lines) produces grandeur.

“ I had an intention of pointing out the passages that particularly struck me; but I was afraid to use my eyes so much.

“ The Essay has lain upon my table; and I think no day has passed without my looking at it, reading a little at a time.

“ Whatever objections presented themselves at first view, were done away in a closer inspection; and I am not quite sure but that is the case in regard to the observation which I have ventured to make on the word Picturesque.

“ I am, &c.

“ JOSHUA REYNOLDS.”

About this time Sir Joshua having failed in his endeavour to establish a gallery for his collection

of ancient pictures, formed the resolution of making a temporary exhibition of them, which accordingly took place in a large room in the Hay-market. The price of admission was one shilling, and as the entire profits were given to his old servant Kirkley, it was called in the catalogue *Ralph's Exhibition*; but some ill-natured wit headed a splenetic critique upon it in the newspapers, with these lines from *Hudibras* :

" A 'squire he had, whose name was Ralph,
Who in the adventure went his half."

The catalogue was drawn up by Sir Joshua himself, and being a curiosity of its kind, two extracts from it follow :

" No. 12. *Lud. Caracci*.—A study of a head from life, for a picture of St. Antonio, which is in the church of ———, at Bologna. In the finished picture all the more minute parts which are here expressed, are there omitted; the light part is one broad mass, and the scanty lock of hair which falls on the forehead is there much fuller and larger: a copy of this picture seen at the same time with this study would be a good lesson to students, by showing the different manners of painting a portrait and an historical head; and teach them at the same time the advantage of always having recourse to nature."

" No. 82. *Bassan*.—*Sheep-shearing*.—At some distance, on a hill, with some difficulty, is seen the

Sacrifice of Isaac. This is a curious instance how little that school considered the art beyond colouring, and a representation of common nature; the sacrifice is here made secondary to the common occupations of husbandmen."

Hitherto the general strength of Sir Joshua had continued firm, and, though he was occasionally much depressed in spirits, his friends felt no alarm from his appearance. Mr. Malone says, that in September of this year he was in such health and spirits, that, on returning to London, from Gregories, in Buckinghamshire, the seat of their mutual friend, Edmund Burke, he and Sir Joshua left the carriage at the inn at Hayes, and walked five miles on the road, in a warm day, without his complaining of any fatigue. He had at that time, though above sixty-eight years of age, the appearance of a man not much beyond fifty, and seemed as likely to live for ten or fifteen years as any of his younger friends.

In about a month after this a tumour collected over his left eye, accompanied by inflammation, to such a degree as made him fearful that it would affect the other eye also. Upon examination, however, it was discovered to have connection with the optic nerve, and to consist only of extravasated blood. Notwithstanding the relief afforded by this information, there were symptoms of internal weakness, which, though he could not describe, made him resolve to withdraw wholly from his pro-

fessional pursuits. Accordingly, on the 10th of November he sent a letter to the Council of the Royal Academy, intimating his intention to resign the office of president on account of bodily infirmities, which disabled him from executing the duties of it to his own satisfaction.

A general meeting of the academicians was then held to take this letter into consideration, when it was resolved to request Sir Joshua to retain the office, and to appoint a deputy to execute the efficient duties. This was assented to, and Mr. West was nominated to that station till the president should be capable of resuming the chair; which, however, he never again occupied; for he laboured under a much more dangerous disease than that connected with the state of his eyes. But what was very remarkable, though the lurking malady deprived him of rest and appetite, he was unable to explain to his medical attendants the nature of his disorder; nor was it till about a fortnight before his death that the precise complaint which afflicted him was even suspected to have its seat in the liver. After being confined to his bed near three months, during which he bore his sufferings with the fortitude of a philosopher and the resignation of a christian, he expired on Thursday evening, the twenty-third of February, 1792. On the body being opened by Mr. John Hunter, it was found that the liver was enlarged to more than double the size. Immediately after

the demise of this admirable artist and excellent man, Mr. Burke drew up the following eulogium, which appeared the next day in the public papers :—

“ Last night, in the sixty-ninth year of his age, died, at his house, in Leicester Fields, Sir Joshua Reynolds. His illness was long, but borne with a mild and cheerful fortitude, without the least mixture of any thing irritable or querulous, agreeably to the placid and even tenour of his whole life. He had, from the beginning of his malady, a distinct view of his dissolution; and he contemplated it with that entire composure, which nothing but the innocence, integrity, and usefulness of his life, and an unaffected submission to the will of Providence, could bestow. In this situation he had every consolation from family tenderness, which his own kindness had indeed well deserved.

“ Sir Joshua Reynolds was, on many accounts, one of the most memorable men of his time. He was the first Englishman who added the praise of the elegant arts to the other glories of his country. In taste, in grace, in facility, in happy invention, and in the richness and harmony of colouring, he was equal to the greatest masters of the renowned ages. In portrait he went beyond them; for he communicated to that description of the art, in which English artists are the most engaged, a variety, a fancy, and a dignity derived from the higher branches, which even those who professed

them in a superior manner, did not always preserve when they delineated individual nature. His portraits remind the spectator of the invention of history, and the amenity of landscape. In painting portraits he appeared not to be raised upon that platform, but to descend upon it from a higher sphere. His paintings illustrate his lessons, and his lessons seem to be derived from his paintings. He possessed the theory as perfectly as the practice of his art. To be such a painter, he was a profound and penetrating philosopher. In full affluence of foreign and domestic fame, admired by the expert in art, and by the learned in science, courted by the great, caressed by sovereign powers, and celebrated by distinguished poets, his native humility never forsook him even on surprise or provocation; nor was the least degree of arrogance or assumption visible to the most scrutinizing eye in any part of his conduct or discourse. His talents of every kind, powerful from nature, and not meanly cultivated by letters; his social virtues, in all the relations and all the habitudes of life, rendered him the centre of a very great and unparalleled variety of agreeable societies, which will be dissipated by his death. He had too much merit not to excite some jealousy, too much innocence to provoke any enmity. The loss of no man of his time can be felt with more sincere, general, and unmixed sorrow.

“ HAIL! AND FAREWELL!”

Of this warm and elegant character, so chaste and correct in every respect, it was justly observed that it was the panegyric of **APELLES** pronounced by **PERICLES**.

Mr. Burke, to whom, as one of the executors, the greatest part of the management of the funeral was intrusted, now applied to the Council of the academy, requesting that the apartment allotted to the exhibition might be prepared, with the usual forms of solemnity, for the reception of the body of the late president to lie there in state, previous to the interment. To such a requisition no objection could be anticipated; and yet, shame to say, an opposition was set up by one person, with such pertinacity, that it was found necessary to lay the case before the King, who gave an instant order that every possible honour should be paid to the remains of the late president of the Royal Academy. Every thing being, therefore, arranged in order, the body was removed on the night of Friday, the second of March, to Somerset House, where it lay in state until the next day, in the model room of the Academy, which was hung with black cloth, and lighted by chandeliers, whilst an escutcheon of arms was emblazoned at the head of the apartment. On Saturday, the expectation of the solemnity had filled all the streets through which the procession was to pass, with crowds of people; while peace-officers were stationed to keep order, and to prevent any carts or

carriages, except those belonging to the funeral, from passing. The persons who attended on this occasion, assembled in the council-chamber and library of the Royal Academy, and the academicians themselves in the great exhibition-room. So extended was the line of carriages, that the procession required nearly two hours to move from Somerset House to St. Paul's; and the last carriage had only set off just as the City Marshals, who led the way, had arrived at the doors of the cathedral, which was at a quarter after two. There the body was met by the dignitaries of the church, and the gentlemen of the choir, who chaunted the proper psalms whilst the procession moved into the body of the church, where the evening service was performed, together with the famous anthem of Dr. Boyce. The chief mourner and gentlemen of the academy were placed by the body; the former in a chair at the head, the two attendants at the feet; the pall-bearers, viz. the Duke of Dorset, Duke of Leeds, Duke of Portland, Marquis Townshend, Marquis of Abercorn, Earl of Carlisle, Earl of Inchiquin, Earl of Upper Ossory, Lord Palmerston, and Lord Eliot, with the executors, Mr. Burke, Mr. Malone, and Mr. Metcalfe, in seats on the decanal side; while the other noblemen and gentlemen occupied those on the opposite side of the choir. Dr. Porteus, the Bishop of London, was in his throne, and the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs in their proper seats.

After the service, the corpse was conveyed to the crypt, underneath the body of the cathedral, and there interred with due solemnity, while the organ pealed above, near to Dr. Newton, late Dean of St. Paul's, and Sir Christopher Wren, its architect.

After the ceremony the procession returned nearly in the same order to Somerset House, where a cold collation was prepared for the members of the academy; and when they were assembled, Mr. Burke entered the room to return the thanks of the family for the attention shown to the remains of their lamented president; but his feelings were so much oppressed, that this powerful orator was obliged to retire without uttering the sentiments he wished to express.

As a token of respect, and a grateful memorial of departed worth, there was presented to each gentleman a print, designed by Burney, and engraved by Bartolozzi, representing a female clasping an urn, with the genius of painting holding an extinguished torch, and pointing to this inscription:

SUCCEDET FAMA, VIVESQUE PER ORA
FERETUR.

The last will of Sir Joshua, written with his own hand, and dated on the 5th of November, 1791, begins thus:—

“As it is probable that I may shortly be deprived of sight, and may not have an opportunity of making a formal will, I desire that the follow-

ing memorandums may be considered as my last will and testament:—

“ I commend my soul to God, in humble hopes of his mercy, and my body to the earth.”

All his property, real and personal, with the exceptions specified in his will, he bequeathed to his niece, Miss Palmer. His other bequests were, to Mrs. Gwatkins, £10,000 in the three per cents.; to his sister, Miss Frances Reynolds, £2,500 in the funds, for life, with the reversion to Miss Palmer; to Mr. Burke, £2,000, with the cancelling of a bond for the like sum borrowed; to the Earl of Upper Ossory the first choice, and Lord Palmerston the second choice, of any picture of his own painting; to Sir Abraham Hume, the choice of his Claudes; to Sir George Beaumont, the *Return of the Ark*, by Sebastian Bourdon; two hundred pounds to each of his executors; and the like to Mr. Boswell; to be expended, if they thought proper, in the purchase of a picture at the sale of his paintings, and to be kept for his sake; his miniature of Milton, by Cooper, to Mr. Mason; one of Oliver Cromwell, by the same artist, to Mr. Richard Burke; his watch and seals to his nephew, William Johnson, Esq. at Calcutta; his picture of the *Angel Contemplation*, which formed the upper part of the *Nativity*, to the Duke of Portland; to Mrs. Bunbury, the portrait of her son; to Mrs. Gwynn, her own portrait with a turban; and one thousand

pounds to his old and faithful servant, Ralph Kirkley, who had lived with him upwards of thirty years.

The whole property of which Sir Joshua died possessed was estimated at eighty thousand pounds; a convincing proof of his extraordinary application, and of the high value set upon his talents.

Several years after his death, a statue of Sir Joshua, executed by Flaxman, was erected to his memory in St. Paul's cathedral; but it may well be questioned, whether the idea of a single colossal figure was the happiest that could have been adopted for such a character. Mrs. Frances Reynolds, the only unmarried sister of Sir Joshua, survived her brother several years, and died at the advanced age of eighty, in 1807. His niece, Miss Palmer, was the daughter of another sister of Sir Joshua, by an eminent attorney of Great Torrington, in Devonshire. She lived with her uncle many years, and soon after his demise married the Earl of Inchiquin, who was subsequently created Marquis of Thomond, whom she survived, and died in 1820. She possessed an highly-gifted and well-cultivated understanding. Her talents were various and distinguished; her conversation was enlightened and brilliant; her manners easy and affable. The brother of the Marchioness was in orders, and became Dean of Cashel.

Another sister of Sir Joshua Reynolds married the Reverend Mr. Johnson, of Great Torrington,

by whom she had two sons, William and Richard, who went to India; where, under the patronage of Warren Hastings, they both realised good fortunes, which they returned to enjoy in England, and died here some years ago. Sir Joshua was uniformly kind to all his relations; and of his liberality to others numerous instances might be produced.

Having taken a fancy to Gainsborough's admirable picture of a girl attending pigs, and asked the price of it; instead of sixty guineas, at which that artist valued his performance, Sir Joshua spontaneously gave him one hundred, saying, he considered the piece as cheap at that rate. Another case is related by the unfortunate Mr. Edward Dayes, who says, "Malice has charged Sir Joshua with avarice, probably from his not having been prodigal, like too many of his profession. His offer to me proves the contrary. At the time that I made the drawings of the King at St. Paul's, after his illness, Sir Joshua complimented me handsomely on seeing them, and afterwards observed, that the labour bestowed must have been such that I could not be remunerated by selling them; but if I would publish them myself, he would lend me the money necessary, and engage to get me a handsome subscription among the nobility."

When Zoffany, the painter, came to England, he was but little known here, and without a patron; but the very first picture which he exhibited was

purchased by Sir Joshua Reynolds, at the price set upon it by the artist himself. This picture, which was a representation of Garrick, in the character of Abel Drugger, Sir Joshua soon afterwards sold to the Earl of Carlisle, for twenty guineas more than he had given for it, which additional sum he immediately paid to Zoffany, saying, he thought he had sold the picture at first below its real value.

Sir Joshua having heard of the unfortunate situation of an artist, who could not stir out for fear of being arrested, hastened to his residence, and learned from the man that forty pounds would enable him to settle with his creditors. After some more conversation Sir Joshua took leave, and at the door shook him by the hand, bidding him be comforted, and he would see what could be done for him. When he was gone, the poor man found that he had left in his hand a bank note for one hundred pounds.

One morning at breakfast, Sir Joshua was very much surprised on reading in the newspaper an account of the conviction of a man for robbing his black servant. On enquiring into the affair, he found that his negro servant had been out all night, and had taken up his lodging in a watch-house, where the prisoner seized the opportunity of his being asleep to steal his watch and money. When the black awoke he missed his property, which, after search, was found upon the thief, who was tried and found

guilty at the next sessions. Sir Joshua was much hurt at the circumstance, and sent his faithful domestic, Ralph, to enquire into the situation of the prisoner, which he found to be deplorable enough. The black was then ordered to take clothes and provisions to the culprit, for whom Sir Joshua soon procured a commutation of his sentence, and he was transported to the colonies.

In the purchase of pictures Sir Joshua spared no expense, as appeared in his offering to cover twice over with guineas the picture of the Witch coming from Hell with a lapfull of charms, by Teniers; which piece he afterwards obtained; as he modestly declared, by only painting a portrait, a fancy subject, and another of his own works. Had his first proposal been taken, the sum would have been little, if any thing short of, one thousand pounds.

Mr. Northcote, in the very entertaining memoir which he has given of his friend and preceptor, tells us that he once asked him if he thought there ever would be in the world a superior to Titian in portrait-painting: to which he answered, that he believed there never would;—that, to procure a really fine picture by Titian, he would consent to sell every thing he possessed in the world to raise the money for the purchase, adding, with emphasis, “I would be content to ruin myself.”

Such, however, was his desire of knowledge and intense anxiety to become acquainted with the

mechanical processes by which the old painters rendered their works durable, that he made no scruple of destroying very valuable paintings to discover the nature of the colours. This was the part of painting in which Sir Joshua was supposed to have laid himself open to criticism, by his practice of making experiments; in consequence of which it was wittily observed, that he came off with flying colours. It was his opinion, however, that the ancient mode of durable colouring was lost, and that art was advanced by such experiments, even where they failed of complete success. This is sound philosophical reasoning, and fully justifies the conduct of the illustrious painter from the frivolous charge of acting capriciously; but, perhaps, a better defence of him could not be made than the observation of Gainsborough, that in his opinion Sir Joshua's pictures, in their most decayed state, were better than those of any other artist in their best condition.

The predominant principle of Sir Joshua Reynolds was integrity, and its concomitant, modesty. He carried this into every part of his conduct, and to this he attributed the elevation which he attained; for whenever a new sitter came to him for a portrait, he always began it with a full resolution to make it the best picture he had ever painted. "My success, and continual improvement in my art," said he, "may be ascribed, in a good measure, to a principle which I will boldly

recommend to imitation ; I mean a principle of honesty ; which, in this, as in all other instances, is, according to the vulgar proverb, certainly the best policy. I always endeavoured to do my best : great or vulgar, good subjects or bad, all have nature ; by the exact representation of which, or even by the endeavour to give such a representation, the painter cannot but improve in his art."

His great felicity lay in pourtraying the beautiful forms of females, but in painting children he stood unrivalled. It was a favourite idea of his, that all the gestures of children are graceful, and that the reign of distortion and unnatural attitude begins with pedagogical restriction and the formalities of the dancing-master.

Such was the placidity of Sir Joshua's temper, and the excellence of his character, that Johnson, who never flattered any one, and whose judgment cannot be called in question, declared that he was the most invulnerable man he knew, and with whom, if he should quarrel, he should find the most difficulty how to abuse.

At one time the Doctor said, " Reynolds, you hate no person living : but I like a good hater !"

And yet Sir Joshua had enough to put his equanimity to the test, for it was not in the nature of things that merit and success like his should pass through the world without exciting the jealousy and enmity of narrow minds. One of his first assailants was Nathaniel Hone, the

portrait painter, who caricatured the president of the Royal Academy, in a picture which he had the assurance to offer for exhibition, and on its being properly rejected, he made a show of that, and some other productions of his pencil, to his own disgrace. But the spleen of Hone was trifling compared to that of Barry, who, after receiving many favours from Sir Joshua Reynolds, and corresponding with him on the best terms, while studying abroad, endeavoured all he could, after his return from Italy, to undervalue his reputation as an artist. Barry affected to be superior to all his contemporaries, and even thought himself equal to Michel Angelo in sublimity of historic design and dignity of expression. One anecdote of this strange man gives a striking proof of his excessive vanity and brutality. The late Duke of Northumberland wishing to patronize a man of genius, invited Barry to his house, where he showed him his pictures; and when the artist noticed a particular quarter of the room as unoccupied, his grace said, that he wished to have it filled with a piece of his painting, at the same time leaving the subject and the price to himself. Barry, after some consideration, pitched upon an historic event, which met with the duke's approbation; who unfortunately observed that he should wish to have his own portrait introduced. Barry said nothing, and the picture was never begun. At length, in answer to the enquiry in what state of

forwardness the painting was, he returned for answer, that if the duke wanted his likeness to be taken he might apply to the fellow in Leicester Fields, meaning, by this vulgar epithet, Sir Joshua Reynolds.

In 1782 Barry was appointed to the professorship of painting at the Royal Academy; but months passed away without any sign of his lecturing; on which Sir Joshua, in the mildest terms possible, ventured one day to ask when he intended to begin: to which question the furious artist returned for answer, "If I had no more to do in the composition of my lectures than to produce such poor flimsy stuff as your Discourses, I should soon have done my work, and be prepared to read;" accompanying this brutal speech with the suitable action of a clenched fist.

After two years' delay, however, he took the rostrum; but it was only to pour forth the vials of wrath and malice against his brethren, the management of the academy, and the performances of the president, who calmly attended for some time to hear himself abused; but finding that the irascibility of the lecturer increased, he thought it most prudent to keep away.

The inconsistency of Barry, however, was so remarkable, that when Sir Joshua died he became as lavish in his praise. He seasoned his panegyric, indeed, so high as to make himself ridiculous; and it was obvious that what he now delivered was a

complete refutation of all that he had been accustomed to vituperate against the illustrious deceased. But Barry was out of his element when he engaged in the amiable work of commendation. His restless and gloomy spirit could not endure the mild atmosphere of urbanity and good will. He fancied all men, particularly those of his own profession, were his enemies, and he certainly treated them in a way that could hardly fail to make them so. Sir Joshua once said to a confidential friend, that he thought it indicative of a bad state of mind to hate any man, but that he feared he did hate Barry, and that, if so, he had much excuse, if excuse were possible. It certainly was a great proof of the philosophy of Sir Joshua, that he should have suffered this turbulent man to go on for so many years, as he did, in disturbing the peace of the Royal Academy by his scandalous conduct as professor of painting. After the president's death, however, the surviving members were not quite so patient. Barry at first received intimations that his conduct was irregular, and must be corrected. This only infuriated his passions to a greater degree, and made him more scurrilous in his language, till at length he was deprived of his office, and next expelled the institution by an unanimous vote of the academicians, which was soon afterwards confirmed by his late Majesty.

Poor Barry, from this time to his death, led a life not unlike that of Timon of Athens, a recluse

in the midst of a great metropolis, where, by a due regard to the laws of society, and a proper appreciation of his talents, he might have gained both affluence and esteem.

The success of Sir Joshua Reynolds was the effect of diligence and a regular discharge of the duties of civil life. His time was methodically divided between business and enjoyment, study and pleasure; the one for his improvement, and the other for the indulgence of the social affections. His ordinary hour of rising was eight in the morning, at nine he breakfasted, and before ten he was in his painting-room. Here he generally employed himself an hour on some study, or on the subordinate parts of any portrait he had then in hand; and from eleven till four he attended those who sat for their pictures. About two days in the week, during the winter, he dined abroad; once, and sometimes oftener, he had company at home, by invitation; and during the remainder of the week he dined with his family, but frequently with the addition of two or three friends. In the evenings, when not engaged at the Royal Academy, or in some public or private assembly, or at the theatre, of which amusement he was fond, he collected a few friends at home, and joined in a party at whist, which was his favourite game. At his table there was always an abundant supply of those elegancies which the season afforded; but though the appetite was gratified by delicacies, and

the glass circulated imperceptibly, every thing was conducted with perfect ease, so that all the guests felt as if they were at home. When engaged in his painting-room he had the pleasure of seeing and conversing with the most beautiful, accomplished, and illustrious characters of his time ; and when not professionally employed, his hours were generally spent in the most enlightened society that England afforded. Thus his mind was constantly invigorated, his manners were uniformly polished, and his conversation was always agreeable. He was a sagacious observer of character, and took a great delight in marking the dawning of juvenile genius, as well as the graceful actions of young persons. To London Sir Joshua was as much attached as his friend Johnson ; and though he had a country-house on Richmond Hill, his visits there were only occasional and of short duration. To young artists he was always accessible, gave them the best counsel, encouraged them by his praises, and not only gave them free admission to his gallery, but leave also to take from thence such pictures and drawings as might be of service to them in their studies. The annual exhibitions engaged much of his attention ; and indeed he always looked to them with some degree of eagerness, because he considered them as presenting the present criterion by which to form a due estimate of the progressive state of the arts.

In his person, Sir Joshua Reynolds was rather

under the middle size, of a florid complexion, and a pleasing cheerful aspect, well made, and exceedingly active. The portraits of him are numerous, and several of them were of his own painting, at different periods of his life. The last which he executed was in 1788, with spectacles, and it is a very exact resemblance of what he was in domestic life. At the Royal Academy is one with his cap and gown, as doctor of the civil law; and in this picture he has very appropriately introduced the bust of Michel Angelo, of whose works he was so great an admirer as to make it his last recommendation to the students to apply to them with unceasing diligence. Numerous engravings have been made from the portraits of Sir Joshua, by Valentine Green, J. Collier, James Watson, Caroline Watson, Charles Townley, J. K. Sherwin, Richard Earlom, Thomas Holloway, and other artists of reputation.

In the summer of 1805 was established the British Institution, by the exertions of that genuine patriot, the late Sir Thomas Bernard; whose object was the encouragement of native art, by enabling its professors to exhibit and dispose of their works to the best advantage. The plan met with the approbation of the late King, who declared himself the patron of the institution, and his present Majesty became its president. The first exhibition took place on the 18th of January, 1806; and it is pleasing to record that the establishment

has gone on in a flourishing state ever since. To give it additional splendour, by showing at one view what had been accomplished by the great founder of the British School of Painting, the directors, after the lapse of a few years, resolved to have an exhibition consisting entirely of the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Accordingly a number of his choicest productions, to the amount of one hundred and forty-two, were voluntarily communicated by their royal and noble possessors, to adorn that which had been the Shakspeare Gallery, in Pall Mall, which was exclusively set apart for this purpose. Previous, however, to the opening of this spectacle to the public, a grand dinner was given on Saturday, May 8, 1813, at Willis's rooms, where the Prince Regent sat as president, and the Marquis of Stafford as vice-president. After dinner, the memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds was drank with the most rapturous expressions of sentimental feeling ; and the presence of the bust of the great artist behind the royal chairman seemed, as it were, to inspire the assembly with enthusiastic animation. At about half-past nine the Prince was conducted by the Marquis of Stafford to the gallery, which was brilliantly illuminated on the occasion. Here the constellation of paintings, all emanating from one hand, which shone on the walls, gave an illustrious proof of the triumphant progress of art in this country ; nor could there be a more magnificent tribute paid

to him by whom that high elevation had been achieved, than what was displayed on this interesting occasion, when all that was beautiful, noble, and royal, met to present the votive offering of admiration at the shrine of genius. It was a scene, in short, to remind the enraptured beholder of that age of heroism and science, when men travelled from the remotest parts to Olympia, to contemplate the immortal works of Phidias; every Greek deeming it a misfortune if death should overtake him before he had the felicity of feasting his eyes with a sight of those unparalleled wonders of human art.*

The catalogue of the paintings of Sir Joshua Reynolds would be too long for this biographical sketch, and therefore, instead of it, we shall conclude with a poetical enumeration of the principal productions of his animated pencil, as given by Mr. Sotheby in his elegant epistle to Sir George Beaumont.

“ Hail! guide and glory of the British school,
Whose magic line gave life to every rule.
REYNOLDS! thy portraits, true to nature, glow'd,
Yet o'er the whole ideal graces flow'd;
While forth to sight the living likeness came,
Souls touch'd by genius, felt thy higher aim.

* Arrian in Epictetus, whose words are, *ἀλλ' εἰς Οὐμπίαν μὲν ἀποθείτε ἐν' εἰδήτε το ἐργὸν τοῦ Φειδίου*, κ. τ. λ.
Edit. Cant. 1655.

Here, where the public gaze a Siddons views,
See Fear and Pity crown the Tragic Muse. (1)
There, girt with flames, where Calpé gleams afar,
In dauntless Heathfield hail the god of war. (2)
Painter of grace ! Love gave to thee alone,
Corregio's melting line, with Titian's tone,
Bade Beauty wear all forms that breathe delight,
And a new charm in each attract the sight :
Here a wild Thais (3) wave the blazing brand,
There yield her zone to Cupid's treacherous hand ;
An Empress melt the pearl (4) in Egypt's bowl,
Or a sly gypsey (5) read the tell-tale soul.
Painter of passion ! horror in thy view,
Pour'd the wild scenes that daring Shakspeare drew ;
When the fiend scowl'd on Beaufort's bed of death, (6)
And each weird hag 'mid lightnings hail'd Macbeth. (7)
Thee, Dante (8) led to Famine's murky cave :
' Round yon mute father hear his children rave ;
Behold them stretch'd beneath his stony eye,
Drop one by one, and gaze on him, and die :
So strains each starting ball in sightless stare,
And each grim feature fix in stern despair.'
No earth-born giant struggling into size,
Stretch'd in thy canvass, sprawls before our eyes ;
The mind applies its standard to the scene,
Notes with mute awe the more than mortal mien,
Where boundless genius, brooding o'er the whole,
Stamps e'en on babes sublimity of soul.
Whether, where terror crowns Jove's infant brow, (9)
Before the god-head aw'd Olympus bow,
Or in yon babe, (10) th' Herculean strength upholds
Th' enormous snakes and slacks their length'ning folds ;
Or while, from heaven celestial grace descends,
Meek on his knees the infant Samuel bends, (11)
Lifts his clasp'd hands, and as he glows in pray'r,
Fixes in awful glance his eye on air."

NOTES.

(1) In allusion to the picture of this celebrated actress as the Tragic Muse. It is in the possession of William Smith, Esq.

(2) The portrait of General Elliot, Lord Heathfield. It is in the National Gallery.

(3) The picture of Thais with a torch, was painted from a beautiful girl named Emily Coventry. She went to the East Indies, and died there. The picture was sold in 1781 to Mr. Charles Greville for one hundred guineas : it afterwards came into the possession of the late Earl of Dysart.

(4) Cleopatra dissolving the pearl, was taken from Kitty Fisher, a noted courtesan, about the year 1760. The picture is in the possession of the Earl of Morley.

(5) Sir Joshua painted two pictures of the Gypsy Fortune-Teller. That here celebrated is in the possession of the Duke of Dorset.

(6) The picture of the Death of Cardinal Beaufort was painted for the Shakspeare of Boydell.

(7) The Cauldron scene in Macbeth, painted for Boydell's Shakspeare.

(8) The picture of Ugolino, in the possession of the Duke of Dorset.

(9) The picture of the Infant Jupiter, in the possession of the Duke of Rutland.

(10) Hercules strangling the Serpents, painted for the Empress of Russia.

(11) Sir Joshua painted four pictures of the Calling of Samuel, all of which have been engraved. The finest is in the possession of the Duke of Rutland.



TO

THE KING.

THE regular progress of cultivated life is from necessities to accommodations, from accommodations to ornaments. By your illustrious predecessors were established **Marts** for manufactures, and **Colleges** for science: but for the arts of elegance, those arts by which manufactures are embellished, and science is refined, to found an **Academy** was reserved for Your Majesty.

Had such patronage been without effect, there had been reason to believe that Nature had, by some insurmountable impediment, obstructed our proficiency; but the annual improvement of the **Exhibitions** which Your Majesty has been pleased to encourage, shows that only encouragement had been wanting.

DEDICATION.

To give advice to those who are contending for royal liberality, has been for some years the duty of my station in the Academy; and these Discourses hope for Your Majesty's acceptance, as well-intended endeavours to incite that emulation which your notice has kindled, and direct those studies which your bounty has rewarded.

May it please Your Majesty,

Your Majesty's

Most dutiful servant,

and most faithful subject,

JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

[1778.]

DISCOURSE I.

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF

THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

JANUARY 2, 1769.



TO
THE MEMBERS
OF
THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

GENTLEMEN,

THAT you have ordered the publication of this Discourse, is not only very flattering to me, as it implies your approbation of the method of study which I have recommended ; but likewise, as this method receives from that act such an additional weight and authority, as demands from the Students that deference and respect, which can be due only to the united sense of so considerable a **BODY of ARTISTS.**

I am,

With the greatest esteem and respect,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most humble and obedient Servant,

JOSHUA REYNOLDS.



DISCOURSE I.

The Advantages proceeding from the Institution of a Royal Academy.—Hints offered to the consideration of the Professors and Visitors.—That an implicit obedience to the Rules of Art be exacted from the Young Students.—That a premature disposition to a masterly dexterity be repressed.—That diligence be constantly recommended, and (that it may be effectual) directed to its proper object.

GENTLEMEN,

AN Academy, in which the Polite Arts may be regularly cultivated, is at last opened among us by Royal Munificence. This must appear an event in the highest degree interesting, not only to the Artist, but to the whole nation.

It is indeed difficult to give any other reason, why an empire like that of BRITAIN should so long have wanted an ornament so suitable to its greatness, than that slow progression of things, which naturally makes elegance and refinement the last effect of opulence and power.

An Institution like this has often been recommended upon considerations merely mercantile ; but an Academy, founded upon such principles, can never effect even its own narrow purposes. If it has an origin no higher, no taste can ever be formed in manufactures ; but if the higher Arts of Design flourish, these inferior ends will be answered of course.

We are happy in having a Prince, who has conceived the design of such an Institution, according to its true dignity ; and who promotes the Arts, as the head of a great, a learned, a polite, and a commercial nation ; and I can now congratulate you, Gentlemen, on the accomplishment of your long and ardent wishes.

The numberless and ineffectual consultations which I have had with many in this assembly to form plans and concert schemes for an Academy, afford a sufficient proof of the impossibility of succeeding but by the influence of MAJESTY. But there have, perhaps, been times, when even the influence of MAJESTY would have been ineffectual ; and it is pleasing to reflect, that we are thus embodied, when every circumstance seems to concur from which honour and prosperity can probably arise.

There are, at this time, a greater number of excellent artists than were ever known before at one period in this nation ; there is a general desire among our Nobility to be distinguished as lovers

and judges of the Arts; there is a greater superfluity of wealth among the people to reward the professors; and, above all, we are patronized by a Monarch, who, knowing the value of science and of elegance, thinks every art worthy of his notice, that tends to soften and humanise the mind.

After so much has been done by HIS MAJESTY, it will be wholly our fault, if our progress is not in some degree correspondent to the wisdom and generosity of the Institution: let us show our gratitude in our diligence, that, though our merit may not answer his expectations, yet, at least, our industry may deserve his protection.

But whatever may be our proportion of success, of this we may be sure, that the present Institution will at least contribute to advance our knowledge of the Arts, and bring us nearer to that ideal excellence, which it is the lot of genius always to contemplate, and never to attain.

The principal advantage of an Academy is, that, besides furnishing able men to direct the Student, it will be a repository for the great examples of the Art. These are the materials on which Genius is to work, and without which the strongest intellect may be fruitlessly or deviously employed. By studying these authentic models, that idea of excellence which is the result of the accumulated experience of past ages, may be at once acquired; and the tardy and obstructed progress of our predecessors, may teach us a shorter and easier way.

The Student receives, at one glance, the principles which many Artists have spent their whole lives in ascertaining; and, satisfied with their effect, is spared the painful investigation by which they came to be known and fixed. How many men of great natural abilities have been lost to this nation, for want of these advantages! They never had an opportunity of seeing those masterly efforts of genius, which at once kindle the whole soul, and force it into sudden and irresistible approbation.

Raffaelle, it is true, had not the advantage of studying in an Academy; but all Rome, and the works of Michael Angelo in particular, were to him an Academy. On the sight of the Capella Sistina, he immediately from a dry, Gothic, and even insipid manner, which attends to the minute accidental discriminations of particular and individual objects, assumed that grand style of painting, which improves partial representation by the general and invariable ideas of nature.

Every seminary of learning may be said to be surrounded with an atmosphere of floating knowledge, where every mind may imbibe somewhat congenial to its own original conceptions. Knowledge, thus obtained, has always something more popular and useful than that which is forced upon the mind by private precepts, or solitary meditation. Besides, it is generally found, that a youth more easily receives instruction from the compa-

nions of his studies, whose minds are nearly on a level with his own, than from those who are much his superiors; and it is from his equals only that he catches the fire of emulation.

One advantage, I will venture to affirm, we shall have in our Academy, which no other nation can boast. We shall have nothing to unlearn. To this praise the present race of Artists have a just claim. As far as they have yet proceeded, they are right. With us the exertions of genius will henceforward be directed to their proper objects. It will not be as it has been in other schools, where he that travelled fastest, only wandered farthest from the right way.

Impressed, as I am, therefore, with such a favourable opinion of my associates in this undertaking, it would ill become me to dictate to any of them. But as these Institutions have so often failed in other nations; and as it is natural to think with regret, how much might have been done, I must take leave to offer a few hints, by which those errors may be rectified, and those defects supplied. These the Professors and Visitors may reject or adopt as they shall think proper.

I would chiefly recommend, that an implicit obedience to the *Rules of Art*, as established by the practice of the great MASTERS, should be exacted from the *young* Students. That those models, which have passed through the approbation of ages, should be considered by them as per-

fect and infallible guides ; as subjects for their imitation, not their criticism.

I am confident, that this is the only efficacious method of making a progress in the Arts ; and that he who sets out with doubting, will find life finished before he becomes master of the rudiments. For it may be laid down as a maxim, that he who begins by presuming on his own sense, has ended his studies as soon as he has commenced them. Every opportunity, therefore, should be taken to discountenance that false and vulgar opinion, that Rules are the fetters of genius ; they are fetters only to men of no genius ; as that armour, which upon the strong is an ornament and a defence, upon the weak and mis-shapen becomes a load, and cripples the body which it was made to protect.

How much liberty may be taken to break through those rules, and, as the Poet expresses it,

To snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,

may be a subsequent consideration, when the pupils become masters themselves. It is then, when their genius has received its utmost improvement, that Rules may possibly be dispensed with. But let us not destroy the scaffold, until we have raised the building.

The Directors ought more particularly to watch over the genius of those Students, who, being more advanced, are arrived at that critical period of study, on the nice management of which their

future turn of taste depends. At that age it is natural for them to be more captivated with what is brilliant, than with what is solid, and to prefer splendid negligence to painful and humiliating exactness.

A facility in composing,—a lively, and what is called, a masterly handling of the chalk or pencil, are, it must be confessed, captivating qualities to young minds, and become of course the objects of their ambition. They endeavour to imitate these dazzling excellencies, which they will find no great labour in attaining. After much time spent in these frivolous pursuits, the difficulty will be to retreat; but it will be then too late; and there is scarce an instance of return to scrupulous labour, after the mind has been debauched and deceived by this fallacious mastery.

By this useless industry they are excluded from all power of advancing in real excellence. Whilst boys, they are arrived at their utmost perfection; they have taken the shadow for the substance; and make the mechanical felicity the chief excellence of the art, which is only an ornament, and of the merit of which few but painters themselves are judges.

This seems to me to be one of the most dangerous sources of corruption; and I speak of it from experience, not as an error which may possibly happen, but which has actually infected all foreign Academies. The directors were probably pleased

with this premature dexterity in their pupils, and praised their dispatch at the expense of their correctness.

But young men have not only this frivolous ambition of being thought masters of execution, inciting them on one hand, but also their natural sloth tempting them on the other. They are terrified at the prospect before them, of the toil required to attain exactness. The impetuosity of youth is disgusted at the slow approaches of a regular siege, and desires, from mere impatience of labour, to take the citadel by storm. They wish to find some shorter path to excellence, and hope to obtain the reward of eminence by other means than those, which the indispensable rules of art have prescribed. They must therefore be told again and again, that labour is the only price of solid fame, and that whatever their force of genius may be, there is no easy method of becoming a good Painter.

When we read the lives of the most eminent Painters, every page informs us, that no part of their time was spent in dissipation. Even an increase of fame served only to augment their industry. To be convinced with what persevering assiduity they pursued their studies, we need only reflect on their method of proceeding in their most celebrated works. When they conceived a subject, they first made a variety of sketches; then a finished drawing of the whole; after that a more correct drawing of every separate part,—heads,

hands, feet, and pieces of drapery; they then painted the picture, and after all retouched it from the life. The pictures, thus wrought with such pains, now appear like the effect of enchantment, and as if some mighty Genius had struck them off at a blow.

But whilst diligence is thus recommended to the Students, the Visitors will take care that their diligence be effectual; that it be well directed, and employed on the proper object. A Student is not always advancing because he is employed; he must apply his strength to that part of the art where the real difficulties lie; to that part which distinguishes it as a liberal art; and not by mistaken industry lose his time in that which is merely ornamental. The Students, instead of vieing with each other which shall have the readiest hand, should be taught to contend who shall have the purest and most correct outline; instead of striving which shall produce the brightest tint, or curiously trifling, shall give the gloss of stuffs, so as to appear real, let their ambition be directed to contend, which shall dispose his drapery in the most graceful folds, which shall give the most grace and dignity to the human figure.

I must beg leave to submit one thing more to the consideration of the Visitors, which appears to me a matter of very great consequence, and the omission of which I think a principal defect in the method of education pursued in all the Academies I

have ever visited. The error I mean is, that the Students never draw exactly from the living models which they have before them. It is not indeed their intention; nor are they directed to do it. Their drawings resemble the model only in the attitude. They change the form according to their vague and uncertain ideas of beauty, and make a drawing rather of what they think the figure ought to be, than of what it appears. I have thought this the obstacle that has stopped the progress of many young men of real genius; and I very much doubt whether a habit of drawing correctly what we see, will not give a proportionable power of drawing correctly what we imagine. He who endeavours to copy nicely the figure before him, not only acquires a habit of exactness and precision, but is continually advancing in his knowledge of the human figure; and though he seems to superficial observers to make a slower progress, he will be found at last capable of adding (without running into capricious wildness) that grace and beauty, which is necessary to be given to his more finished works, and which cannot be got by the moderns, as it was not acquired by the ancients, but by an attentive and well compared study of the human form.

What I think ought to enforce this method is, that it has been the practice (as may be seen by their drawings) of the great Masters in the Art. I will mention a drawing of Raffaello, *The Dispute*

of the Sacrament, the print of which, by Count Caius, is in every hand. It appears, that he made his sketch from one model; and the habit he had of drawing exactly from the form before him, appears by his making all the figures with the same cap, such as his model then happened to wear; so servile a copyist was this great man, even at a time when he was allowed to be at his highest pitch of excellence.

I have seen also Academy figures by Annibale Caracci, though he was often sufficiently licentious in his finished works, drawn with all the peculiarities of an individual model.

This scrupulous exactness is so contrary to the practice of the Academies, that is not without great deference, that I beg leave to recommend to the consideration of the Visitors; and submit to them, whether the neglect of this method is not one of the reasons why Students so often disappoint expectation, and, being more than boys at sixteen, become less than men at thirty.

In short, the method I recommend can only be detrimental where there are but few living forms to copy; for then students, by always drawing from one alone, will by habit be taught to overlook defects, and mistake deformity for beauty. But of this there is no danger; since the Council has determined to supply the Academy with a variety of subjects; and indeed those laws which they have drawn up, and which the Secretary will presently

read for your confirmation, have in some measure precluded me from saying more upon this occasion. Instead, therefore, of offering my advice, permit me to indulge my wishes, and express my hope, that this Institution may answer the expectation of its ROYAL FOUNDER; that the present age may vie in Arts with that of LEO the Tenth; and that *the dignity of the dying Art* (to make use of an expression of Pliny) may be revived under the Reign of GEORGE THE THIRD.

DISCOURSE II.

DELIVERED TO THE STUDENTS OF

THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

ON THE

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRIZES,

DECEMBER 11, 1769.



DISCOURSE II.

The Course and Order of Study.—The different Stages of Art.—Much copying discountenanced. —The Artist at all times and in all places should be employed in laying up materials for the exercise of his Art.

GENTLEMEN,

I CONGRATULATE you on the honour which you have just received. I have the highest opinion of your merits, and could wish to show my sense of them in something which possibly may be more useful to you than barren praise. I could wish to lead you into such a course of study as may render your future progress answerable to your past improvement; and, whilst I applaud you for what has been done, remind you how much yet remains to attain perfection.

I flatter myself, that from the long experience I have had, and the unceasing assiduity with which I have pursued those studies, in which, like you, I have been engaged, I shall be acquitted of vanity

in offering some hints to your consideration. They are indeed in a great degree founded upon my own mistakes in the same pursuit. But the history of errors, properly managed, often shortens the road to truth. And although no method of study, that I can offer, will of itself conduct to excellence, yet it may preserve industry from being misapplied.

In speaking to you of the Theory of the Art, I shall only consider it as it has a relation to the *method* of your studies.

Dividing the study of painting into three distinct periods, I shall address you as having passed through the first of them, which is confined to the rudiments; including a facility of drawing any object that presents itself, a tolerable readiness in the management of colours, and an acquaintance with the most simple and obvious rules of composition.

This first degree of proficiency is, in painting, what grammar is in literature, a general preparation for whatever species of the art the Student may afterwards choose for his more particular application. The power of drawing, modelling, and using colours, is very properly called the language of the art; and in this language, the honours you have just received prove you to have made no inconsiderable progress.

When the Artist is once enabled to express him-

self with some degree of correctness, he must then endeavour to collect subjects for expression ; to amass a stock of ideas, to be combined and varied as occasion may require. He is now in the second period of study, in which his business is to learn all that has been known and done before his own time. Having hitherto received instructions from a particular master, he is now to consider the Art itself as his master. He must extend his capacity to more sublime and general instructions. Those perfections which lie scattered among various masters, are now united in one general idea, which is henceforth to regulate his taste, and enlarge his imagination. With a variety of models thus before him, he will avoid that narrowness and poverty of conception which attends a bigoted admiration of a single master, and will cease to follow any favourite where he ceases to excel. This period is, however, still a time of subjection and discipline. Though the Student will not resign himself blindly to any single authority, when he may have the advantage of consulting many, he must still be afraid of trusting his own judgment, and of deviating into any track where he cannot find the footsteps of some former master.

The third and last period emancipates the Student from subjection to any authority, but what he shall himself judge to be supported by reason. Confiding now in his own judgment, he will consider and separate those different principles to

which different modes of beauty owe their original. In the former period he sought only to know and combine excellence, wherever it was to be found, into one idea of perfection ; in this he learns what requires the most attentive survey, and the most subtle disquisition, to discriminate perfections that are incompatible with each other.

He is from this time to regard himself as holding the same rank with those masters whom he before obeyed as teachers ; and as exercising a sort of sovereignty over those Rules which have hitherto restrained him. Comparing now no longer the performances of Art with each other, but examining the Art itself by the standard of nature, he corrects what is erroneous, supplies what is scanty, and adds, by his own observation, what the industry of his predecessors may have yet left wanting to perfection. Having well established his judgment, and stored his memory, he may now without fear try the power of his imagination. The mind that has been thus disciplined, may be indulged in the warmest enthusiasm, and venture to play on the borders of the wildest extravagance. The habitual dignity which long converse with the greatest minds has imparted to him, will display itself in all his attempts ; and he will stand among his instructors, not as an imitator, but a rival.

These are the different stages of the Art. But as I now address myself particularly to those Students who have been this day rewarded for their

happy passage through the first period, I can with no propriety suppose they want any help in the initiatory studies. My present design is to direct your view to distant excellence, and to show you the readiest path that leads to it. Of this I shall speak with such latitude, as may leave the province of the professor uninvaded; and shall not anticipate those precepts, which it is his business to give, and your duty to understand.

It is indisputably evident that a great part of every man's life must be employed in collecting materials for the exercise of genius. Invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory; nothing can come of nothing: he who has laid up no materials, can produce no combinations.

A Student unacquainted with the attempts of former adventurers, is always apt to over-rate his own abilities; to mistake the most trifling excursions for discoveries of moment, and every coast new to him, for a new-found country. If by chance he passes beyond his usual limits, he congratulates his own arrival at those regions which they who have steered a better course have long left behind them.

The productions of such minds are seldom distinguished by an air of originality: they are anticipated in their happiest efforts; and if they are found to differ in any thing from their prede-

cessors, it is only in irregular sallies, and trifling conceits. The more extensive, therefore, your acquaintance is with the works of those who have excelled, the more extensive will be your powers of invention; and what may appear still more like a paradox, the more original will be your conceptions. But the difficulty on this occasion is to determine what ought to be proposed as models of excellence, and who ought to be considered as the properest guides.

To a young man just arrived in Italy, many of the present painters of that country are ready enough to obtrude their precepts, and to offer their own performances as examples of that perfection which they affect to recommend. The Modern, however, who recommends himself as a standard, may justly be suspected as ignorant of the true end, and unacquainted with the proper object, of the art which he professes. To follow such a guide, will not only retard the Student, but mislead him.

On whom then can he rely, or who shall show him the path that leads to excellence? The answer is obvious: those great masters who have travelled the same road with success are the most likely to conduct others. The works of those who have stood the test of ages, have a claim to that respect and veneration to which no modern can pretend. The duration and stability of their fame is sufficient to evince that it has not been sus-

pended upon the slender thread of fashion and caprice, but bound to the human heart by every tie of sympathetic approbation.

There is no danger of studying too much the works of those great men ; but how they may be studied to advantage is an enquiry of great importance.

Some who have never raised their minds to the consideration of the real dignity of the Art, and who rate the works of an Artist in proportion as they excel or are defective in the mechanical parts, look on theory as something that may enable them to talk but not to paint better ; and confining themselves entirely to mechanical practice, very assiduously toil on in the drudgery of copying ; and think they make a rapid progress while they faithfully exhibit the minutest part of a favourite picture. This appears to me a very tedious, and I think a very erroneous method of proceeding. Of every large composition, even of those which are most admired, a great part may be truly said to be *common-place*. This, though it takes up much time in copying, conduces little to improvement. I consider general copying as a delusive kind of industry ; the Student satisfies himself with the appearance of doing something ; he falls into the dangerous habit of imitating without selecting, and of labouring without any determinate object ; as it requires no effort of the mind, he sleeps over his work : and those powers of

invention and composition which ought particularly to be called out, and put in action, lie torpid, and lose their energy for want of exercise.

How incapable those are of producing any thing of their own, who have spent much of their time in making finished copies, is well known to all who are conversant with our art.

To suppose that the complication of powers, and variety of ideas necessary to that mind which aspires to the first honours in the Art of Painting, can be obtained by the frigid contemplation of a few single models, is no less absurd, than it would be in him who wishes to be a Poet, to imagine that by translating a tragedy he can acquire to himself sufficient knowledge of the appearances of nature, the operations of the passions, and the incidents of life.

The great use in copying, if it be at all useful, should seem to be in learning to colour; yet even colouring will never be perfectly attained by servilely copying the model before you. An eye critically nice can only be formed by observing well-coloured pictures with attention: and by close inspection and minute examination, you will discover, at last, the manner of handling, the artifices of contrast, glazing, and other expedients, by which good colourists have raised the value of their tints, and by which nature has been so happily imitated.

I must inform you, however, that old pictures, deservedly celebrated for their colouring, are often so changed by dirt and varnish, that we ought not

to wonder if they do not appear equal to their reputation in the eyes of inexperienced painters, or young students. An artist whose judgment is matured by long observation, considers rather what the picture once was, than what it is at present. He has by habit acquired a power of seeing the brilliancy of tints through the cloud by which it is obscured. An exact imitation, therefore, of those pictures, is likely to fill the Student's mind with false opinions; and to send him back a colourist of his own formation, with ideas equally remote from nature and from art, from the genuine practice of the masters, and the real appearances of things.

Following these rules, and using these precautions, when you have clearly and distinctly learned in what good colouring consists, you cannot do better than have recourse to nature herself, who is always at hand, and in comparison of whose true splendour the best coloured pictures are but faint and feeble.

However, as the practice of copying is not entirely to be excluded, since the mechanical practice of painting is learned in some measure by it, let those choice parts only be selected which have recommended the work to notice. If its excellence consists in its general effect, it would be proper to make slight sketches of the machinery and general management of the picture. Those sketches should be kept always by you for the regulation of your style. Instead of copying the touches of

those great masters, copy only their conceptions. Instead of treading in their footsteps, endeavour only to keep the same road. Labour to invent on their general principles and way of thinking. Possess yourself with their spirit. Consider with yourself how a Michael Angelo or a Raffaele would have treated this subject: and work yourself into a belief that your picture is to be seen and criticised by them when completed. Even an attempt of this kind will rouse your powers.

But as mere enthusiasm will carry you but a little way, let me recommend a practice that may be equivalent to, and will perhaps more efficaciously contribute to your advancement, than even the verbal corrections of those masters themselves, could they be obtained. What I would propose is, that you should enter into a kind of competition, by painting a similar subject, and making a companion to any picture that you consider as a model. After you have finished your work, place it near the model, and compare them carefully together. You will then not only see, but feel your own deficiencies more sensibly than by precepts or any other means of instruction. The true principles of painting will mingle with your thoughts. Ideas thus fixed by sensible objects, will be certain and definitive; and sinking deep into the mind, will not only be more just, but more lasting than those presented to you by precepts only; which will always be fleeting, variable, and undetermined.

This method of comparing your own efforts with those of some great master, is indeed a severe and mortifying task, to which none will submit, but such as have great views, with fortitude sufficient to forego the gratifications of present vanity for future honour. When the Student has succeeded in some measure to his own satisfaction, and has felicitated himself on his success, to go voluntarily to a tribunal where he knows his vanity must be humbled, and all self-approbation must vanish, requires not only great resolution but great humility. To him, however, who has the ambition to be a real master, the solid satisfaction which proceeds from a consciousness of his advancement, (of which seeing his own faults is the first step,) will very abundantly compensate for the mortification of present disappointment. There is, besides, this alleviating circumstance. Every discovery he makes, every acquisition of knowledge he attains, seems to proceed from his own sagacity; and thus he acquires a confidence in himself sufficient to keep up the resolution of perseverance.

We all must have experienced how lazily, and consequently how ineffectually, instruction is received when forced upon the mind by others. Few have been taught to any purpose, who have not been their own teachers. We prefer those instructions which we have given ourselves, from our affection to the instructor; and they are more effectual, from being received into the mind at the very

time when it is most open and eager to receive them:

With respect to the pictures that you are to choose for your models, I could wish that you would take the world's opinion rather than your own. In other words, I would have you choose those of established reputation, rather than follow your own fancy. If you should not admire them at first, you will, by endeavouring to imitate them, find that the world has not been mistaken.

It is not an easy task to point out those various excellencies for your imitation, which lie distributed amongst the various schools. An endeavour to do this may perhaps be the subject of some future discourse. I will, therefore, at present only recommend a model for style in Painting, which is a branch of the art more immediately necessary to the young Student. Style in painting is the same as in writing, a power over materials, whether words or colours, by which conceptions or sentiments are conveyed. And in this Ludovico Caracci (I mean in his best works) appears to me to approach the nearest to perfection. His unaffected breadth of light and shadow, the simplicity of colouring, which, holding its proper rank, does not draw aside the least part of the attention from the subject, and the solemn effect of that twilight which seems diffused over his pictures, appear to me to correspond with grave and dignified subjects, better than the more artificial brilliancy of sunshine

which enlightens the pictures of Titian: though Tintoret thought that Titian's colouring was the model of perfection, and would correspond even with the sublime of Michael Angelo; and that if Angelo had coloured like Titian, or Titian designed like Angelo, the world would once have had a perfect painter.

It is our misfortune, however, that those works of Caracci which I would recommend to the Student, are not often found out of Bologna. *The St. Francis in the midst of his Friars*;—*The Transfiguration*;—*The Birth of St. John the Baptist*;—*The Calling of St. Matthew*;—*The St. Jerome*;—*The Fresco Paintings* in the Zampieri palace, are all worthy the attention of the Student. And I think those who travel would do well to allot a much greater portion of their time to that city, than it has been hitherto the custom to bestow.

In this art, as in others, there are many teachers who profess to show the nearest way to excellence; and many expedients have been invented by which the toil of study might be saved. But let no man be seduced to idleness by specious promises. Excellence is never granted to man, but as the reward of labour. It argues indeed no small strength of mind to persevere in habits of industry, without the pleasure of perceiving those advances, which, like the hand of a clock, whilst they make hourly approaches to their point, yet proceed so slowly as to escape observation. A facility of drawing, like

that of playing upon a musical instrument, cannot be acquired but by an infinite number of acts. I need not, therefore, enforce by many words the necessity of continual application; nor tell you that the port-crayon ought to be for ever in your hands. Various methods will occur to you by which this power may be acquired. I would particularly recommend, that after your return from the Academy, (where I suppose your attendance to be constant,) you would endeavour to draw the figure by memory. I will even venture to add, that by perseverance in this custom, you will become able to draw the human figure tolerably correct, with as little effort of the mind as is required to trace with a pen the letters of the alphabet.

That this facility is not unattainable, some members in this Academy give a sufficient proof. And be assured, that if this power is not acquired whilst you are young, there will be no time for it afterwards: at least the attempt will be attended with as much difficulty as those experience who learn to read or write after they have arrived to the age of maturity.

But while I mention the port-crayon as the Student's constant companion, he must still remember, that the pencil is the instrument by which he must hope to obtain eminence. What, therefore, I wish to impress upon you is, that whenever an opportunity offers, you may paint your studies instead of drawing them. This will give you such a facility in

using colours, that in time they will arrange themselves under the pencil, even without the attention of the hand that conducts it. If one act excluded the other, this advice could not with any propriety be given. But if Painting comprises both drawing and colouring, and if by a short struggle of resolute industry, the same expedition is attainable in painting as in drawing on paper, I cannot see what objection can justly be made to the practice; or why that should be done by parts, which may be done all together.

If we turn our eyes to the several schools of Painting, and consider their respective excellencies, we shall find that those who excel most in colouring, pursued this method. The Venetian and Flemish schools, which owe much of their fame to colouring, have enriched the cabinets of the collectors of drawings, with very few examples. Those of Titian, Paul Veronese, Tintoret, and the Bassans, are in general slight and undetermined. Their sketches on paper are as rude as their pictures are excellent in regard to harmony of colouring. Correggio and Baroccio have left few, if any, finished drawings behind them. And in the Flemish school, Rubens and Vandyck made their designs for the most part either in colours, or in chiaro-oscuro. It is as common to find studies of the Venetian and Flemish Painters on canvass, as of the schools of Rome and Florence on paper. Not but that many finished drawings are sold

under the names of those masters. Those, however, are undoubtedly the productions either of engravers or their scholars, who copied their works.

These instructions I have ventured to offer from my own experience; but as they deviate widely from received opinions, I offer them with diffidence; and when better are suggested, shall retract them without regret.

There is one precept, however, in which I shall only be opposed by the vain, the ignorant, and the idle. I am not afraid that I shall repeat it too often. You must have no dependance on your own genius. If you have great talents, industry will improve them; if you have but moderate abilities, industry will supply their deficiency. Nothing is denied to well-directed labour: nothing is to be obtained without it. Not to enter into metaphysical discussions on the nature or essence of genius, I will venture to assert, that assiduity unabated by difficulty, and a disposition eagerly directed to the object of its pursuit, will produce effects similar to those which some call the result of *natural powers*.

Though a man cannot at all times, and in all places, paint or draw, yet the mind can prepare itself by laying in proper materials, at all times, and in all places. Both Livy and Plutarch, in describing Philopœmen, one of the ablest generals of antiquity, have given us a striking picture of

a mind always intent on its profession, and by assiduity obtaining those excellencies which some all their lives vainly expect from nature. I shall quote the passage in Livy at length, as it runs parallel with the practice I would recommend to the Painter, Sculptor, and Architect.

“ Philopœmen was a man eminent for his sagacity and experience in choosing ground, and in leading armies ; to which he formed his mind by perpetual meditation, in times of peace as well as war. When, in any occasional journey, he came to a strait difficult passage, if he was alone, he considered with himself, and if he was in company he asked his friends, what it would be best to do if in this place they had found an enemy, either in the front or in the rear, on the one side or on the other. ‘ It might happen,’ says he, ‘ that the enemy to be opposed might come on drawn up in regular lines, or in a tumultuous body, formed only by the nature of the place.’ He then considered a little what ground he should take ; what number of soldiers he should use, and what arms he should give them ; where he should lodge his carriages, his baggage, and the defenceless followers of his camp ; how many guards, and of what kind, he should send to defend them ; and whether it would be better to press forward along the pass, or recover by retreat his former station : he would consider likewise where his camp could most commodiously be formed ; how much ground

he should enclose within his trenches ; where he should have the convenience of water, and where he might find plenty of wood and forage ; and when he should break up his camp on the following day, through what road he could most safely pass, and in what form he should dispose his troops. With such thoughts and disquisitions he had from his early years so exercised his mind, that on these occasions nothing could happen which he had not been already accustomed to consider."

I cannot help imagining that I see a promising young painter equally vigilant, whether at home or abroad, in the streets or in the fields. Every object that presents itself, is to him a lesson. He regards all Nature with a view to his profession ; and combines her beauties, or corrects her defects. He examines the countenance of men under the influence of passion ; and often catches the most pleasing hints from subjects of turbulence or deformity. Even bad pictures themselves supply him with useful documents ; and, as Lionardo da Vinci has observed, he improves upon the fanciful images that are sometimes seen in the fire, or are accidentally sketched upon a discoloured wall.

The Artist who has his mind thus filled with ideas, and his hand made expert by practice, works with ease and readiness ; whilst he who would have you believe that he is waiting for the inspirations of Genius, is in reality at a loss how to begin ;

and is at last delivered of his monsters, with difficulty and pain.

The well-grounded painter, on the contrary, has only maturely to consider his subject, and all the mechanical parts of his art follow without his exertion. Conscious of the difficulty of obtaining what he possesses, he makes no pretensions to secrets, except those of closer application. Without conceiving the smallest jealousy against others, he is contented that all shall be as great as himself, who have undergone the same fatigue ; and as his pre-eminence depends not upon a trick, he is free from the painful suspicions of a juggler, who lives in perpetual fear lest his trick should be discovered.



DISCOURSE III.

DELIVERED TO THE STUDENTS OF

THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

ON THE

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRIZES,

DECEMBER 14, 1770.



DISCOURSE III.

*The great leading principles of the Grand Style.—
Of Beauty.—The genuine habits of Nature to be
distinguished from those of Fashion.*

GENTLEMEN,

IT is not easy to speak with propriety to so many Students of different ages and different degrees of advancement. The mind requires nourishment adapted to its growth; and what may have promoted our earlier efforts, might retard us in our nearer approaches to perfection.

The first endeavours of a young Painter, as I have remarked in a former Discourse, must be employed in the attainment of mechanical dexterity, and confined to the mere imitation of the object before him. Those who have advanced beyond the rudiments, may, perhaps, find advantage in reflecting on the advice which I have likewise given them, when I recommended the diligent study of the works of our great predecessors; but I at the same time endeavoured to guard them

against an implicit submission to the authority of any one master however excellent: or by a strict imitation of his manner, precluding themselves from the abundance and variety of Nature. I will now add, that Nature herself is not to be too closely copied. There are excellencies in the art of painting beyond what is commonly called the imitation of Nature; and these excellencies I wish to point out. The Students who, having passed through the initiatory exercises are more advanced in the art, and who, sure of their hand, have leisure to exert their understanding, must now be told, that a mere copier of Nature can never produce any thing great; can never raise and enlarge the conceptions, or warm the heart of the spectator.

The wish of the genuine painter must be more extensive: instead of endeavouring to amuse mankind with the minute neatness of his imitations, he must endeavour to improve them by the grandeur of his ideas; instead of seeking praise, by deceiving the superficial sense of the spectator, he must strive for fame, by captivating the imagination.

The principle now laid down, that the perfection of this art does not consist in mere imitation, is far from being new or singular. It is, indeed, supported by the general opinion of the enlightened part of mankind. The poets, orators, and rhetoricians of antiquity, are continually enforcing this position; that all the arts receive their perfection

from an ideal beauty, superior to what is to be found in individual nature. They are ever referring to the practice of the painters and sculptors of their times, particularly Phidias, (the favourite artist of antiquity,) to illustrate their assertions. As if they could not sufficiently express their admiration of his genius by what they knew, they have recourse to poetical enthusiasm : they call it inspiration ; a gift from Heaven. The artist is supposed to have ascended the celestial regions, to furnish his mind with this perfect idea of beauty.

“ He,” says Proclus*, “ who takes for his model
“ such forms as Nature produces, and confines
“ himself to an exact imitation of them, will never
“ attain to what is perfectly beautiful. For the
“ works of nature are full of disproportion, and
“ fall very short of the true standard of beauty.
“ So that Phidias, when he formed his Jupiter,
“ did not copy any object ever presented to his
“ sight ; but contemplated only that image which
“ he had conceived in his mind from Homer’s
“ description.” And thus Cicero, speaking of
the same Phidias : “ Neither did this artist,”
says he, “ when he carved the image of Jupiter
“ or Minerva, set before him any one human
“ figure, as a pattern, which he was to copy ;
“ but having a more perfect idea of beauty fixed
“ in his mind, this is steadily contemplated, and

* Lib. 2. in Timæum Platonis, as cited by Junius de Pictura Veterum. R.

“ to the imitation of this, all his skill and labour
“ were directed.”

The Moderns are not less convinced than the Ancients of this superior power existing in the art ; nor less sensible of its effects. Every language has adopted terms expressive of this excellence. The *gusto grande* of the Italians, the *beau ideal* of the French, and the *great style, genius, and taste* among the English, are but different appellations of the same thing. It is this intellectual dignity, they say, that ennobles the painter's art ; that lays the line between him and the mere mechanic ; and produces those great effects in an instant, which eloquence and poetry, by slow and repeated efforts, are scarcely able to attain.

Such is the warmth with which both the Ancients and Moderns speak of this divine principle of the art ; but, as I have formerly observed, enthusiastic admiration seldom promotes knowledge. Though a Student by such praise may have his attention roused, and a desire excited, of running in this great career, yet it is possible that what has been said to excite, may only serve to deter him. He examines his own mind, and perceives there nothing of that divine inspiration, with which he is told so many others have been favoured. He never travelled to Heaven to gather new ideas, and he finds himself possessed of no other qualifications than what mere common observation and a plain understanding can confer. Thus

he becomes gloomy amidst the splendour of figurative declamation, and thinks it hopeless to pursue an object which he supposes out of the reach of human industry.

But on this, as upon many other occasions, we ought to distinguish how much is to be given to enthusiasm, and how much to reason. We ought to allow for, and we ought to commend, that strength of vivid expression, which is necessary to convey, in its full force, the highest sense of the most complete effect of art; taking care, at the same time, not to lose in terms of vague admiration, that solidity and truth of principle, upon which alone we can reason, and may be enabled to practise.

It is not easy to define in what this great style consists; nor to describe, by words, the proper means of acquiring it, if the mind of the Student should be at all capable of such an acquisition. Could we teach taste or genius by rules, they would be no longer taste and genius. But though there neither are, nor can be, any precise invariable rules for the exercise, or the acquisition, of these great qualities, yet we may truly say, that they always operate in proportion to our attention in observing the works of Nature, to our skill in selecting, and to our care in digesting, methodizing, and comparing our observations. There are many beauties in our art, that seem, at first, to lie without the reach of precept, and yet may easily

be reduced to practical principles. Experience is all in all ; but it is not every one who profits by experience ; and most people err, not so much from want of capacity to find their object, as from not knowing what object to pursue. This great ideal perfection and beauty are not to be sought in the heavens, but upon the earth. They are about us, and upon every side of us. But the power of discovering what is deformed in Nature, or in other words, what is particular and uncommon, can be acquired only by experience ; and the whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists, in my opinion, in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind.

All the objects which are exhibited to our view by nature, upon close examination will be found to have their blemishes and defects. The most beautiful forms have something about them like weakness, minuteness, or imperfection. But it is not every eye that perceives these blemishes. It must be an eye long used to the contemplation and comparison of these forms ; and which by a long habit of observing what any set of objects of the same kind have in common, has acquired the power of discerning what each wants in particular. This long laborious comparison should be the first study of the painter, who aims at the greatest style. By this means, he acquires a just idea of beautiful forms ; he corrects nature by herself, her imperfect

state by her more perfect. His eye being enabled to distinguish the accidental deficiencies, exences, and deformities of things, from their general figures, he makes out an abstract idea of their forms more perfect than any one original ; and what may seem a paradox, he learns to design naturally by drawing his figures unlike to any one object. This idea of the perfect state of nature, which the Artist calls the ideal beauty, is the great leading principle by which works of genius are conducted. By this, Phidias acquired his fame. He wrought upon a sober principle what has so much excited the enthusiasm of the world ; and by this method you, who have courage to tread the same path, may acquire equal reputation.

This is the idea which has acquired, and which seems to have a right to the epithet of *divine* ; as it may be said to preside, like a supreme judge, over all the productions of nature appearing to be possessed of the will and intention of the Creator, as far as they regard the external form of living beings. When a man once possesses this idea in its perfection, there is no danger but that he will be sufficiently warmed by it himself, and be able to warm and ravish every one else.

Thus it is from a reiterated experience, and a close comparison of the objects in nature, that an artist becomes possessed of the idea of that central form, if I may so express it, from which every deviation is deformity. But the investigation of

this form, I grant, is painful, and I know but of one method of shortening the road; this is, by a careful study of the works of the ancient sculptors; who, being indefatigable in the school of nature, have left models of that perfect form behind them, which an artist would prefer as supremely beautiful, who had spent his whole life in that single contemplation. But if industry carried them thus far, may not you also hope for the same reward from the same labour? We have the same school opened to us that was opened to them; for Nature denies her instructions to none, who desire to become her pupils.

This laborious investigation, I am aware, must appear superfluous to those who think every thing is to be done by felicity, and the powers of native genius. Even the great Bacon treats with ridicule the idea of confining proportion to rules, or of producing beauty by selection. "A man cannot tell," (says he,) "whether Apelles or Albert Durer were the more trifler: whereof the one would make a personage by geometrical proportions; the other, by taking the best parts out of divers faces, to make one excellent. . . . The painter," (he adds,) "must do it by a kind of felicity, . . . and not by rule." *

It is not safe to question any opinion of so great a writer, and so profound a thinker, as undoubtedly Bacon was. But he studies brevity to excess;

* *Essays*, p. 252. edit. 1625.

and therefore his meaning is sometimes doubtful. If he means that beauty has nothing to do with rule, he is mistaken. There is a rule, obtained out of general nature, to contradict which is to fall into deformity. Whenever any thing is done beyond this rule, it is in virtue of some other rule which is followed along with it, but which does not contradict it. Every thing which is wrought with certainty, is wrought upon some principle. If it is not, it cannot be repeated. If by felicity is meant any thing of chance or hazard, or something born with a man, and not earned, I cannot agree with this great philosopher. Every object which pleases must give us pleasure upon some certain principles : but as the objects of pleasure are almost infinite, so their principles vary without end, and every man finds them out, not by felicity or successful hazard, but by care and sagacity.

To the principle I have laid down, that the idea of beauty in each species of beings is an invariable one, it may be objected, that in every particular species there are various central forms, which are separate and distinct from each other, and yet are undeniably beautiful ; that in the human figure, for instance, the beauty of Hercules is one, of the Gladiator another, of the Apollo another ; which makes so many different ideas of beauty.

It is true, indeed, that these figures are each perfect in their kind, though of different characters and proportions : but still none of them is the

representation of an individual, but of a class. And as there is one general form, which, as I have said, belongs to the human kind at large, so in each of these classes there is one common idea and central form, which is the abstract of the various individual forms belonging to that class. Thus, though the forms of childhood and age differ exceedingly, there is a common form in childhood, and a common form in age, which is the more perfect, as it is more remote from all peculiarities. But I must add further, that though the most perfect forms of each of the general divisions of the human figure are ideal, and superior to any individual form of that class, yet the highest perfection of the human figure is not to be found in any one of them. It is not in the Hercules, nor in the Gladiator, nor in the Apollo, but in that form which is taken from all, and which partakes equally of the activity of the Gladiator, of the delicacy of the Apollo, and the muscular strength of the Hercules. For perfect beauty in any species must combine all the characters which are beautiful in that species. It cannot consist in any one to the exclusion of the rest: no one, therefore, must be predominant, that no one may be deficient.

The knowledge of these different characters, and the power of separating and distinguishing them, is undoubtedly necessary to the painter who is to vary his compositions with figures of various forms and proportions, though he is never to lose

sight of the general idea of perfection in each kind.

There is, likewise, a kind of symmetry, or proportion, which may properly be said to belong to deformity. A figure lean or corpulent, tall or short, though deviating from beauty, may still have a certain union of the various parts, which may contribute to make them on the whole not unpleasing.

When the artist has by diligent attention acquired a clear and distinct idea of beauty and symmetry; when he has reduced the variety of nature to the abstract idea; his next task will be to become acquainted with the genuine habits of nature, as distinguished from those of fashion. For in the same manner, and on the same principles, as he has acquired the knowledge of the real forms of nature, distinct from accidental deformity, he must endeavour to separate simple chaste nature, from those adventitious, those affected and forced airs or actions, with which she is loaded by modern education.

Perhaps I cannot better explain what I mean, than by reminding you of what was taught us by the Professor of Anatomy, in respect to the natural position and movement of the feet. He observed, that the fashion of turning them outwards was contrary to the intent of nature, as might be seen from the structure of the bones, and from the weakness that proceeded from that manner of standing. To this we may add the erect position of the head, the

projection of the chest, the walking with straight knees, and many such actions, which we know to be merely the result of fashion, and what nature never warranted, as we are sure that we have been taught them when children.

I have mentioned but a few of those instances, in which vanity or caprice have contrived to distort and disfigure the human form; your own recollection will add to these a thousand more of ill-understood methods, which have been practised to disguise nature among our dancing-masters, hair-dressers, and tailors, in their various schools of deformity.*

However the mechanic and ornamental arts may sacrifice to Fashion, she must be entirely excluded from the Art of Painting; the painter must never mistake this capricious changeling for the genuine offspring of nature; he must divest himself of all prejudices in favour of his age or country; he must disregard all local and temporary ornaments, and look only on those general habits which are every where and always the same; he addresses his works to the people of every country and every age, he calls upon posterity to be his spectators, and says with Zeuxis *in æternitatem pingo*.

* "Those," says Quintilian, "who are taken with the outward show of things, think that there is more beauty in persons, who are trimmed, curled, and painted, than uncorrupt nature can give; as if beauty were merely the effect of the corruption of manners." R.

The neglect of separating modern fashions from the habits of nature, leads to that ridiculous style which has been practised by some painters, who have given to Grecian heroes the airs and graces practised in the court of Louis the Fourteenth; an absurdity almost as great as it would have been to have dressed them after the fashion of that court.

To avoid this error, however, and to retain the true simplicity of nature, is a task more difficult than at first sight it may appear. The prejudices in favour of the fashions and customs that we have been used to, and which are justly called a second nature, make it too often difficult to distinguish that which is natural from that which is the result of education; they frequently even give a predilection in favour of the artificial mode; and almost every one is apt to be guided by those local prejudices, who has not chastised his mind, and regulated the instability of his affections by the eternal invariable idea of nature.

Here then, as before, we must have recourse to the Ancients as instructors. It is from a careful study of their works that you will be enabled to attain to the real simplicity of nature. they will suggest many observations which would probably escape you, if your study were confined to nature alone. And, indeed, I cannot help suspecting, that in this instance, the ancients had an easier task than the moderns. They had, pro-

bably, little or nothing to unlearn, as their manners were nearly approaching to this desirable simplicity; while the modern artist, before he can see the truth of things, is obliged to remove a veil, with which the fashion of the times has thought proper to cover her.

Having gone thus far in our investigation of the great style in painting; if we now should suppose that the artist has found the true idea of beauty, which enables him to give his works a correct and perfect design; if we should suppose also, that he has acquired a knowledge of the unadulterated habits of nature, which gives him simplicity; the rest of his task is, perhaps, less than is generally imagined. Beauty and simplicity have so great a share in the composition of a great style, that he who has acquired them has little else to learn. It must not, indeed, be forgotten, that there is a nobleness of conception, which goes beyond any thing in the mere exhibition even of perfect form; there is an art of animating and dignifying the figures with intellectual grandeur, of impressing the appearance of philosophic wisdom, or heroic virtue. This can only be acquired by him that enlarges the sphere of his understanding by a variety of knowledge, and warms his imagination with the best productions of ancient and modern poetry.

A hand thus exercised, and a mind thus instructed, will bring the art to a higher degree of

excellence than perhaps it has hitherto attained in this country. Such a student will disdain the humbler walks of painting, which, however profitable, can never assure him a permanent reputation. He will leave the meaner artist servilely to suppose that those are the best pictures, which are most likely to deceive the spectator. He will permit the lower painter, like the florist or collector of shells, to exhibit the minute discriminations which distinguish one object of the same species from another; while he, like the philosopher, will consider nature in the abstract, and represent in every one of his figures the character of its species.

If deceiving the eye were the only business of the art, there is no doubt, indeed, but the minute painter would be more apt to succeed; but it is not the eye, it is the mind which the painter of genius desires to address; nor will he waste a moment upon those smaller objects which only serve to catch the sense, to divide the attention, and to counteract his great design of speaking to the heart.

This is the ambition which I wish to excite in your minds; and the object I have had in my view, throughout this Discourse, is that one great idea which gives to painting its true dignity, which entitles it to the name of a liberal art, and ranks it as a sister of poetry.

It may possibly have happened to many young students, whose application was sufficient to over

come all difficulties, and whose minds were capable of embracing the most extensive views, that they have, by a wrong direction originally given, spent their lives in the meaner walks of painting, without ever knowing there was a nobler to pursue. Albert Durer, as Vasari has justly remarked, would probably have been one of the first painters of his age, (and he lived in an era of great artists,) had he been initiated into those great principles of the art, which were so well understood and practised by his contemporaries in Italy. But unluckily having never seen or heard of any other manner, he, without doubt, considered his own as perfect.

As for the various departments of painting, which do not presume to make such high pretensions, they are many. None of them are without their merit, though none enter into competition with this universal presiding idea of the art. The painters who have applied themselves more particularly to low and vulgar characters, and who express with precision the various shades of passion, as they are exhibited by vulgar minds, (such as we see in the works of Hogarth,) deserve great praise; but as their genius has been employed on low and confined subjects, the praise which we give must be as limited as its object. The merry-making or quarrelling of the boors of Teniers; the same sort of productions of Brouwer, or Ostade, are excellent in their kind; and the excellence and its praise will be in proportion, as;

in those limited subjects, and peculiar forms, they introduce more or less of the expression of those passions, as they appear in general and more enlarged nature. This principle may be applied to the battle-pieces of Bourgoigne, the French gallantries of Watteau, and even beyond the exhibition of animal life, to the landscapes of Claude Lorraine, and the sea-views of Vanderelde. All these painters have, in general, the same right, in different degrees, to the name of a painter, which a satirist, and epigrammatist, a sonnetteer, a writer of pastorals or descriptive poetry, has to that of a poet.

In the same rank, and perhaps of not so great merit, is the cold painter of portraits. But his correct and just imitation of his object has its merit. Even the painter of still life, whose highest ambition is to give a minute representation of every part of these low objects which he sets before him, deserves praise in proportion to his attainment; because no part of this excellent art, so much the ornament of polished life, is destitute of value and use. These, however, are by no means the views to which the mind of the student ought to be *primarily* directed. Having begun by aiming at better things, if from particular inclination, or from the taste of the times and place he lives in, or from necessity, or from failure in the highest attempts, he is obliged to descend lower, he will bring into the lower sphere of art a grandeur of composition and

character, that will raise and ennoble his works far above their natural rank.

A man is not weak, though he may not be able to wield the club of Hercules ; nor does a man always practise that which he esteems the best ; but does that which he can best do. In moderate attempts there are many walks open to the artist. But as the idea of beauty is of necessity but one, so there can be but one great mode of painting ; the leading principle of which I have endeavoured to explain.

I should be sorry, if what is here recommended, should be at all understood to countenance a careless or undetermined manner of painting. For though the painter is to overlook the accidental discriminations of nature, he is to exhibit distinctly, and with precision, the general forms of things. A firm and determined outline is one of the characteristics of the great style in painting ; and let me add, that he who possesses the knowledge of the exact form which every part of nature ought to have, will be fond of expressing that knowledge with correctness and precision in all his works.

To conclude ; I have endeavoured to reduce the idea of beauty to general principles : and I had the pleasure to observe that the Professor of Painting proceeded in the same method, when he showed you that the artifice of contrast was founded but on one principle. I am convinced that this is the only means of advancing science ; of clearing the mind

*of. . . on R. he cleared my mind of a
great deal of error*

from a confused heap of contradictory observations, that do but perplex and puzzle the student, when he compares them, or misguide him if he gives himself up to their authority; bringing them under one general head, can alone give rest and satisfaction to an inquisitive mind.



DISCOURSE IV.

DELIVERED TO THE STUDENTS OF

THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

ON THE

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRIZES,

DECEMBER 10, 1771.



DISCOURSE IV.

General ideas, the presiding principle which regulates every part of Art, Invention, Expression, Colouring, and Drapery.—Two distinct styles in History-Painting, the Grand, and the Ornamental.—The schools in which each is to be found.—The Composite style.—The style formed on local customs and habits, or a partial view of nature.

GENTLEMEN,

THE value and rank of every art is in proportion to the mental labour employed in it, or mental pleasure produced by it. As this principle is observed or neglected, our profession becomes either a liberal art, or a mechanical trade. In the hands of one man it makes the highest pretensions, as it is addressed to the noblest faculties: in those of another it is reduced to a mere matter of ornament; and the painter has but the humble province of furnishing our apartments with elegance.

This exertion of mind, which is the only circumstance that truly ennobles our art, makes the great distinction between the Roman and Venetian

schools. I have formerly observed that perfect form is produced by leaving out particularities, and retaining only general ideas: I shall now endeavour to show that this principle, which I have proved to be metaphysically just, extends itself to every part of the art; that it gives what is called the *grand style*, to Invention, to Composition, to Expression, and even to Colouring and Drapery.

Invention in painting does not imply the invention of the subject; for that is commonly supplied by the poet or historian. With respect to the choice, no subject can be proper that is not generally interesting. It ought to be either some eminent instance of heroic action, or heroic suffering. There must be something either in the action, or in the object, in which men are universally concerned, and which powerfully strikes upon the public sympathy.

Strictly speaking, indeed, no subject can be of universal, hardly can it be of general, concern; but there are events and characters so popularly known in those countries where our art is in request, that they may be considered as sufficiently general for all our purposes. Such are the great events of Greek and Roman fable and history, which early education, and the usual course of reading, have made familiar and interesting to all Europe, without being degraded by the vulgarism of ordinary life in any country. Such too are the capital subjects of Scripture history, which, beside their general

notoriety, become venerable by their connection with our religion.

As it is required that the subject selected should be a general one, it is no less necessary that it should be kept unembarrassed with whatever may any way serve to divide the attention of the spectator. Whenever a story is related, every man forms a picture in his mind of the action and expression of the persons employed. The power of representing this mental picture on canvass is what we call invention in a painter. And as in the conception of this ideal picture, the mind does not enter into the minute peculiarities of the dress, furniture, or scene of action ; so when the painter comes to represent it, he contrives those little necessary concomitant circumstances in such a manner, that they shall strike the spectator no more than they did himself in his first conception of the story.

I am very ready to allow, that some circumstances of minuteness and particularity frequently tend to give an air of truth to a piece, and to interest the spectator in an extraordinary manner. Such circumstances therefore cannot wholly be rejected : but if there be any thing in the art which requires peculiar nicety of discernment, it is the disposition of these minute circumstantial parts ; which, according to the judgment employed in the choice, become so useful to truth, or so injurious to grandeur.

However, the usual and most dangerous error is on the side of minuteness ; and therefore I think caution most necessary where most have failed. The general idea constitutes real excellence. All smaller things, however perfect in their way, are to be sacrificed without mercy to the greater. The painter will not inquire what thing may be admitted without much censure ; he will not think it enough to show that they may be there ; he will show that they must there ; that their absence would render his picture maimed and defective.

Thus, though to the principal group a second or third be added, and a second and third mass of light, care must be taken that these subordinate actions and lights, neither each in particular, nor all together, come into any degree of competition with the principal : they should merely make a part of that whole which would be imperfect without them. To every kind of painting this rule may be applied. Even in portraits, the grace, and, we may add, the likeness, consists more in taking the general air, than in observing the exact similitude of every feature.

Thus figures must have a ground whereon to stand ; they must be clothed ; there must be a background ; there must be light and shadow ; but none of these ought to appear to have taken up any part of the artist's attention. They should be so managed as not even to catch that of the spectator. We know well enough, when we analyze a piece,

the difficulty and the subtilty with which an artist adjusts the back-ground, drapery, and masses of light; we know that a considerable part of the grace and effect of his picture depends upon them; but this art is so much concealed, even to a judicious eye, that no remains of any of these subordinate parts occur to the memory when the picture is not present.

The great end of the art is to strike the imagination. The painter therefore is to make no ostentation of the means by which this is done; the spectator is only to feel the result in his bosom. An inferior artist is unwilling that any part of his industry should be lost upon the spectator. He takes as much pains to discover, as the greater artist does to conceal, the marks of his subordinate assiduity. In works of the lower kind, every thing appears studied and encumbered; it is all boastful art, and open affectation. The ignorant often part from such pictures with wonder in their mouths, and indifference in their hearts.

But it is not enough in Invention that the artist should restrain and keep under all the inferior parts of his subject; he must sometimes deviate from vulgar and strict historical truth, in pursuing the grandeur of his design.

How much the great style exacts from its professors to conceive and represent their subjects in a poetical manner, not confined to mere matter of fact, may be seen in the Cartoons of Raffaele.

In all the pictures in which the painter has represented the Apostles, he has drawn them with great nobleness ; he has given them as much dignity as the human figure is capable of receiving ; yet we are expressly told in Scripture they had no such respectable appearance ; and of St. Paul in particular, we are told by himself, that his *bodily* presence was *mean*. Alexander is said to have been of a low stature : a painter ought not so to represent him. Agesilaus was low, lame, and of a mean appearance : none of these defects ought to appear in a piece of which he is the hero. In conformity to custom, I call this part of the art History Painting ; it ought to be called Poetical, as in reality it is.

All this is not falsifying any fact ; it is taking an allowed poetical licence. A painter of portraits retains the individual likeness ; a painter of history, shows the man by showing his actions. A painter must compensate the natural deficiencies of his art. He has but one sentence to utter, but one moment to exhibit. He cannot, like the poet or historian, expatiate, and impress the mind with great veneration for the character of the hero or saint he represents, though he lets us know at the same time, that the saint was deformed, or the hero lame. The painter has no other means of giving an idea of the dignity of the mind, but by that external appearance which grandeur of thought does generally, though not always, impress on the

countenance; and by that correspondence of figure to sentiment and situation, which all men wish, but cannot command. The painter who may in this one particular attain with ease what others desire in vain, ought to give all that he possibly can, since there are so many circumstances of true greatness that he cannot give at all. He cannot make his hero talk like a great man; he must make him look like one. For which reason, he ought to be well studied in the analysis of those circumstances which constitute dignity of appearance in real life.

As in Invention, so likewise in Expression, care must be taken not to run into particularities. Those expressions alone should be given to the figures which their respective situations generally produce. Nor is this enough; each person should also have that expression which men of his rank generally exhibit. The joy, or the grief, of a character of dignity is not to be expressed in the same manner as a similar passion in a vulgar face. Upon this principle, Bernini, perhaps, may be subject to censure. This sculptor, in many respects admirable, has given a very mean expression to his statue of David, who is represented as just going to throw the stone from the sling; and in order to give it the expression of energy, he has made him biting his under-lip. This expression is far from being general, and still farther from being dignified. He might have seen it in an instance or two; and he mistook accident for generality.

With respect to Colouring, though it may appear at first a part of painting merely mechanical, yet it still has its rules, and those grounded upon that presiding principle which regulates both the great and the little in the study of a painter. By this, the first effect of the picture is produced ; and as this is performed, the spectator as he walks the gallery, will stop, or pass along. To give a general air of grandeur at first view, all trifling, or artful play of little lights, or an attention to a variety of tints is to be avoided ; a quietness and simplicity must reign over the whole work ; to which a breadth of uniform and simple colour, will very much contribute. Grandeur of effect is produced by two different ways, which seem entirely opposed to each other. One is, by reducing the colours to little more than *chiara oscuro*, which was often the practice of the Bolognian schools ; and the other, by making the colours very distinct and forcible, such as we see in those of Rome and Florence ; but still, the presiding principle of both those manners, is simplicity. Certainly, nothing can be more simple than monotony ; and the distinct blue, red, and yellow colours which are seen in the draperies of the Roman and Florentine schools, though they have not that kind of harmony which is produced by a variety of broken and transparent colours, have that effect of grandeur which was intended. Perhaps these distinct colours strike the mind more forcibly, from there not being any

great union between them ; as martial music, which is intended to rouse the nobler passions, has its effect from the sudden and strongly marked transitions from one note to another, which that style of music requires ; whilst in that which is intended to move the softer passions, the notes imperceptibly melt into one another.

In the same manner as the historical painter never enters into the detail of colours, so neither does he debase his conceptions with minute attention to the discriminations of drapery. It is the inferior style that marks the variety of stuffs. With him, the clothing is neither woollen, nor linen, nor silk, satin, or velvet : it is drapery ; it is nothing more. The art of disposing the foldings of the drapery makes a very considerable part of the painter's study. To make it merely natural, is a mechanical operation, to which neither genius nor taste are required ; whereas, it requires the nicest judgment to dispose the drapery, so that the folds shall have an easy communication, and gracefully follow each other, with such natural negligence as to look like the effect of chance, and at the same time show the figure under it to the utmost advantage.

Carlo Maratti was of opinion, that the disposition of drapery was a more difficult art than even that of drawing the human figure ; that a student might be more easily taught the latter than the former ; as the rules of drapery, he said, could not be

so well ascertained as those for delineating a correct form. This, perhaps, is a proof how willingly we favour our own peculiar excellence. Carlo Maratti is said to have valued himself particularly upon his skill in this part of his art; yet in him, the disposition appears so ostentatiously artificial, that he is inferior to Raffaele, even in that which gave him his best claim to reputation.

Such is the great principle by which we must be directed in the nobler branches of our art. Upon this principle, the Roman, the Florentine, the Bolognese schools, have formed their practice; and by this they have deservedly obtained the highest praise. These are the three great schools of the world in the epic style. The best of the French school, Poussin, Le Sueur, and Le Brun, have formed themselves upon these models, and consequently may be said, though Frenchmen, to be a colony from the Roman school. Next to these, but in a very different style of excellence, we may rank the Venetian, together with the Flemish and the Dutch schools; all professing to depart from the great purposes of painting, and catching at applause by inferior qualities.

I am not ignorant that some will censure me for placing the Venetians in this inferior class, and many of the warmest admirers of painting will think them unjustly degraded; but I wish not to be misunderstood. Though I can by no means allow them to hold any rank with the nobler

schools of painting, they accomplished perfectly the thing they attempted. But as mere elegance is their principal object, as they seem more willing to dazzle than to affect, it can be no injury to them to suppose that their practice is useful only to its proper end. But what may heighten the elegant may degrade the sublime. There is a simplicity, and I may add, severity, in the great manner, which is, I am afraid, almost incompatible with this comparatively sensual style.

Tintoret, Paul Veronese, and others of the Venetian school, seem to have painted with no other purpose than to be admired for their skill and expertness in the mechanism of painting, and to make a parade of that art, which, as I before observed, the higher style requires its followers to conceal.

In a conference of the French Academy, at which were present Le Brun, Sebastian, Bourdon, and all the eminent artists of that age, one of the academicians desired to have their opinion on the conduct of Paul Veronese, who, though a painter of great consideration, had, contrary to the strict rules of art, in his picture of Perseus and Andromeda, represented the principal figure in shade. To this question no satisfactory answer was then given. But I will venture to say, that if they had considered the class of the artist, and ranked him as an ornamental painter, there would have been no difficulty in answering—"It was unreasonable

“ to expect what was never intended. His intention was solely to produce an effect of light and shadow ; every thing was to be sacrificed to that intent, and the capricious composition of that picture suited very well with the style which he professed.”

Young minds are indeed too apt to be captivated by this splendor of style ; and that of the Venetians is particularly pleasing ; for by them, all those parts of the art that gave pleasure to the eye or sense, have been cultivated with care, and carried to the degree nearest to perfection. The powers exerted in the mechanical part of the art have been called *the language of painters* ; but we may say that it is but poor eloquence which only shows that the orator can talk. Words should be employed as the means, not as the end : language is the instrument, conviction is the work.

The language of painting must indeed be allowed these masters ; but even in that, they have shown more copiousness than choice, and more luxuriance than judgment. If we consider the uninteresting subjects of their invention, or at least the uninteresting manner in which they are treated ; if we attend to their capricious composition, their violent and affected contrasts, whether of figures, or of light and shadow, the richness of their drapery, and at the same time, the mean effect which the discrimination of stuffs gives to their

pictures; if to these we add their total inattention to expression; and then reflect on the conceptions and learning of Michael Angelo, or the simplicity of Raffaele, we can no longer dwell on the comparison. Even in colouring, if we compare the quietness and chastity of the Bolognese pencil to the bustle and tumult that fills every part of a Venetian picture, without the least attempt to interest the passions, their boasted art will appear a mere struggle without effect; "*a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.*"

Such as suppose that the great style might happily be blended with the ornamental; that the simple, grave and majestic dignity of Raffaele could unite with the glow and bustle of a Paolo or Tintoret, are totally mistaken. The principles by which each is attained are so contrary to each other, that they seem, in my opinion, incompatible, and as impossible to exist together, as that in the mind the most sublime ideas and the lowest sensuality should at the same time be united.

The subjects of the Venetian painters are mostly such as give them an opportunity of introducing a great number of figures; such as feasts, marriages, and processions, public martyrdoms, or miracles. I can easily conceive that Paul Veronese, if he were asked, would say, that no subject was proper for an historical picture, but such as admitted at least forty figures; for in a less

number, he would assert, there could be no opportunity of the painter's showing his art in composition, his dexterity of managing and disposing the masses of light and groups of figures, and of introducing a variety of Eastern dresses and characters in their rich stuffs.

But the thing is very different with a pupil of the greater schools. Annibale Caracci thought twelve figures sufficient for any story; he conceived that more would contribute to no end but to fill space; that they would be but cold spectators of the general action, or to use his own expression, that they would be *figures to be let*. Besides, it is impossible for a picture composed of so many parts to have that effect so indispensably necessary to grandeur, that of one complete whole. However contradictory it may be in geometry, it is true in taste, that many little things will not make a great one. The sublime impresses the mind at once with one great idea; it is a single blow: the elegant indeed may be produced by repetition; by an accumulation of many minute circumstances.

However great the difference is between the composition of the Venetian, and the rest of the Italian schools, there is full as great a disparity in the effect of their pictures as produced by colours. And though in this respect the Venetians must be allowed extraordinary skill, yet even that skill, as they have employed it, will but ill correspond with

the great style. Their colouring is not only too brilliant, but, I will venture to say, too harmonious, to produce that solidity, steadiness, and simplicity of effect, which heroic subjects require, and which simple or grave colours only can give to a work. That they are to be cautiously studied by those who are ambitious of treading the great walk of history is confirmed, if it wants confirmation, by the greatest of all authorities, Michael Angelo. This wonderful man, after having seen a picture by Titian, told Vasaro, who accompanied him * “that he liked much his colouring and manner;” but then he added, “that it was a pity the Venetian painters did not learn to draw correctly in their early youth, and adopt a better *method of study.*”

By this it appears, that the principal attention of the Venetian painters, in the opinion of Michael Angelo, seemed to be engrossed by the study of colours, to the neglect of the *ideal beauty of form*, or propriety of expression. But if general censure was given to that school from the sight of a picture of Titian, how much more heavily and more justly would the censure fall on Paolo Veronese, and more especially on Tintoret? And here I

* Dicendo, che molto gli piaceva il colorito suo, e la maniera; mà che era un peccato, che a Venezia non s'imparasse da principio a disegnare bene, e che non havessano que' pittori miglior modo nello studio. Vas. tom. iii. p. 226. Vita di Tiziano.

cannot avoid citing Vasari's opinion of the style and manner of Tintoret. "Of all the extraordinary geniuses *," says he, "that have practised the art of painting, for wild, capricious, extravagant, and fantastical inventions; for furious impetuosity and boldness in the execution of his work, there is none like Tintoret; his strange whimsies are even beyond extravagance, and his works seem to be produced rather by chance, than in consequence of any previous design, as if he wanted to convince the world that the art was a trifle, and of the most easy attainment."

For my own part, when I speak of the Venetian painters, I wish to be understood to mean Paolo Veronese and Tintoret, to the exclusion of Titian; for though his style is not so pure as that of many other of the Italian schools, yet there is a sort of senatorial dignity about him, which, however awkward in his imitators, seems to become him exceedingly. His portraits alone, from the nobleness and simplicity of character which he always

* Nelle cose della pittura, stravagante, capriccioso, presto, e risoluto, et il più terribile cervello, che habbia havuto mai la pittura, come si può vedere in tutte le sue opere; e ne' componimenti delle storie, fantastiche, e fatte da lui diversamente, e fuori dell' uso degli altri pittori: anzi hà superato la stravaganza, con le nuove, e capricciose inventioni, e strani ghiribizzi del suo intelletto, che ha lavorato a caso, e senza disegno, quasi monstrando che quest' arte è una baia.

gave them, will entitle him to the greatest respect, as he undoubtedly stands in the first rank in this branch of the art.

It is not with Titian, but with the seducing qualities of the two former, that I could wish to caution you against being too much captivated. These are the persons who may be said to have exhausted all the powers of florid eloquence, to debauch the young and inexperienced; and have, without doubt, been the cause of turning off the attention of the connoisseur and of the patron of art, as well as that of the painter, from those higher excellencies of which the art is capable, and which ought to be required in every considerable production. By them, and their imitators, a style merely ornamental has been disseminated throughout all Europe. Rubens carried it to Flanders: Voet to France; and Lucca Giordano, to Spain and Naples.

The Venetian is indeed the most splendid of the schools of elegance; and it is not without reason, that the best performances in this lower school are valued higher than the second-rate performances of those above them; for every picture has value when it has a decided character, and is excellent in its kind. But the student must take care not be so much dazzled with this splendor, as to be tempted to imitate what must ultimately lead from perfection. Poussin, whose eye was always steadily fixed on the sublime, has been

often heard to say, "That a particular attention
" to colouring was an obstacle to the student, in
" his progress to the great end and design of the
" art; and that he who attaches himself to this
" principal end, will acquire by practice a reason-
" able good method of colouring."*

Though it be allowed that elaborate harmony of colouring, a brilliancy of tints, a soft and gradual transition from one to another, present to the eye, what an harmonious concert of music does to the ear, it must be remembered, that painting is not merely a gratification of the sight. Such excellence, though properly cultivated, where nothing higher than elegance is intended, is weak and unworthy of regard, when the work aspires to grandeur and sublimity.

The same reasons that have been urged to show that a mixture of the Venetian style cannot improve the great style, will hold good in regard to the Flemish and Dutch schools. Indeed the Flemish school, of which Rubens is the head, was formed upon that of the Venetian; like them, he took his figures too much from the people before him. But it must be allowed in favour of the Venetians, that he was more gross than they, and

* Que cette application singuliere n'etoit qu'un obstacle pour empêcher de parvenir au veritable but de la peinture, & celui qui s'attache au principal, acquiert par la pratique une assez belle maniere de peindre. Conference de l'Acad. Franc.

carried all their mistaken methods to a far greater excess. In the Venetian school itself, where they all err from the same cause, there is a difference in the effect. The difference between Paolo and Bassano seems to be only, that one introduced Venetian gentlemen into his pictures, and the other, the boors of the district of Bassano, and called them patriarchs and prophets.

The painters of the Dutch school have still more locality. With them, a history piece is properly a portrait of themselves; whether they describe the inside or outside of their houses, we have their own people engaged in their own peculiar occupations; working or drinking, playing or fighting. The circumstances that enter into a picture of this kind, are so far from giving a general view of human life, that they exhibit all the minute particularities of a nation differing in several respects from the rest of mankind. Yet, let them have their share of more humble praise. The painters of this school are excellent in their own way; they are only ridiculous when they attempt general history on their own narrow principles, and debase great events by the meanness of their characters.

Some inferior dexterity, some extraordinary mechanical power, is apparently that from which they seek distinction. Thus, we see, that school alone has the custom of representing candle-light not as it really appears to us by night, but red, as

it would illuminate objects to a spectator by day. Such tricks, however pardonable in the little style, where petty effects are the sole end, are inexcusable in the greater, where the attention should never be drawn aside by trifles, but should be entirely occupied by the subject itself.

The same local principles which characterize the Dutch school, extend even to their landscape painters ; and Rubens himself, who has painted many landscapes, has sometimes transgressed in this particular. Their pieces in this way are, I think, always a representation of an individual spot, and each in its kind a very faithful but a very confined portrait. Claude Lorrain, on the contrary, was convinced, that taking nature as he found it seldom produced beauty. His pictures are a composition of the various draughts which he had previously made from various beautiful scenes and prospects. However, Rubens in some measure has made amends for the deficiency with which he is charged ; he has contrived to raise and animate his otherwise uninteresting views, by introducing a rainbow, storm, or some particular accidental effect of light. That the practice of Claude Lorrain, in respect to his choice, is to be adopted by landscape painters in opposition to that of the Flemish and Dutch schools, there can be no doubt, as its truth is founded upon the same principle as that by which the historical painter acquires perfect form. But whether landscape

painting has a right to aspire so far as to reject what the painters call Accidents of Nature, is not easy to determine. It is certain Claude Lorrain seldom, if ever, availed himself of those accidents; either he thought that such peculiarities were contrary to that style of general nature which he professed, or that it would catch the attention too strongly, and destroy that quietness and repose which he thought necessary to that kind of painting.

A portrait painter likewise, when he attempts history, unless he is upon his guard, is likely to enter too much into the detail. He too frequently makes his historical heads look like portraits; and this was once the custom amongst those old painters, who revived the art before general ideas were practised or understood. An history painter paints man in general; a portrait painter, a particular man, and consequently a defective model.

Thus an habitual practice in the lower exercises of the art will prevent many from attaining the greater. But such of us who move in these humbler walks of the profession, are not ignorant that, as the natural dignity of the subject is less, the more all the little ornamental helps are necessary to its embellishment. It would be ridiculous for a painter of domestic scenes, of portraits, landscapes, animals, or still life, to say that he despised those qualities which has made the subordinate schools so famous. The art of colouring, and the

skilful management of light and shadow, are essential requisites in his confined labours. If we descend still lower, what is the painter of fruit and flowers without the utmost art in colouring, and what the painters call handling; that is, a lightness of pencil that implies great practice, and gives the appearance of being done with ease? Some here, I believe, must remember a flower painter whose boast it was, that he scorned to paint for the *million*: no, he professed to paint in the true Italian taste; and despising the crowd, called strenuously upon the *few* to admire him. His idea of the Italian taste was to paint as black and dirty as he could, and to leave all clearness and brilliancy of colouring to those who were fonder of money than immortality. The consequence was such as might be expected. For these petty excellencies are here essential beauties; and without this merit the artist's work will be more short-lived than the objects of his imitation.

From what has been advanced, we must now be convinced that there are two distinct styles in history painting: the Grand, and the Splendid or Ornamental.

The great style stands alone, and does not require, perhaps does not so well admit, any addition from inferior beauties. The ornamental style also possesses its own peculiar merit. However, though the union of the two may make a sort of composite style, yet that style is likely to be more

imperfect than either of those which go to its composition. Both kinds have merit, and may be excellent though in different ranks, if uniformity be preserved, and the general and particular ideas of nature be not mixed. Even the meanest of them is difficult enough to attain; and the first place being already occupied by the great artists in each department, some of those who followed thought there was less room for them, and feeling the impulse of ambition and the desire of novelty, and being at the same time perhaps willing to take the shortest way, endeavoured to make for themselves a place between both. This they have effected by forming an union of the different orders. But as the grave and majestic style would suffer by an union with the florid and gay, so also has the Venetian ornament in some respect been injured by attempting an alliance with simplicity.

It may be asserted, that the great style is always more or less contaminated by any meaner mixture. But it happens in a few instances, that the lower may be improved by borrowing from the grand. Thus if a portrait painter is desirous to raise and improve his subject, he has no other means than by approaching it to a general idea. He leaves out all the minute breaks and peculiarities in the face, and changes the dress from a temporary fashion to one more permanent, which has annexed to it no

ideas of meanness from its being familiar to us. But if an exact resemblance of an individual be considered as the sole object to be aimed at, the portrait painter will be apt to lose more than he gains by the acquired dignity taken from general nature. It is very difficult to ennoble the character of a countenance but at the expense of the likeness, which is what is most generally required by such as sit to the painter.

Of those who have practised the composite style, and have succeeded in this perilous attempt, perhaps the foremost is Correggio. His style is founded upon modern grace and elegance, to which is superadded something of the simplicity of the grand style. A breadth of light and colour, the general ideas of the drapery, an uninterrupted flow of outline, all conspire to this effect. Next to him (perhaps equal to him) Parmegiano has dignified the genteelness of modern effeminacy, by uniting it with the simplicity of the ancients and the grandeur and severity of Michael Angelo. It must be confessed, however, that these two extraordinary men, by endeavouring to give the utmost degree of grace, have sometimes perhaps exceeded its boundaries, and have fallen into the most hateful of all hateful qualities, affectation. Indeed, it is the peculiar characteristic of men of genius to be afraid of coldness and insipidity, from which they think they never can be too far removed. It particularly

happens to these great masters of grace and elegance. They often boldly drive on to the very verge of ridicule ; the spectator is alarmed, but at the same time admires their vigor and intrepidity :

Strange graces still, and stranger flights they had,

* * * * *

Yet ne'er so sure our passion to create,

As when they touch'd the brink of all we hate.

The errors of genius, however, are pardonable, and none even of the more exalted painters are wholly free from them ; but they have taught us, by the rectitude of their general practice, to correct their own affected or accidental deviation. The very first have not been always upon their guard, and perhaps there is not a fault, but what may take shelter under the most venerable authorities ; yet that style only is perfect, in which the noblest principles are uniformly pursued ; and those masters only are entitled to the first rank in our estimation, who have enlarged the boundaries of their art, and have raised it to its highest dignity, by exhibiting the general ideas of nature.

On the whole, it seems to me that there is but one presiding principle, which regulates, and gives stability to every art. The works, whether of poets, painters, moralists, or historians, which are built upon general nature, live for ever ; while those which depend for their existence on particular customs and habits, a partial view of nature, or the fluctuation of fashion, can only be coeval with that

which first raised them from obscurity. Present time and future may be considered as rivals, and he who solicits the one must expect to be discountenanced by the other.

DISCOURSE V.

DELIVERED TO THE STUDENTS OF

THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

ON THE

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRIZES,

DECEMBER 10, 1772.



DISCOURSE V.

Circumspection required in endeavouring to unite contrary excellencies.—The expression of a mixed passion not to be attempted.—Examples of those who excelled in the great style.—Raffaelle, Michael Angelo, those two extraordinary men compared with each other.—The Characteristical style.—Salvator Rosa mentioned as an example of that style; and opposed to Carlo Maratti.—Sketch of the characters of Poussin and Rubens.—These two Painters entirely dissimilar, but consistent with themselves.—This consistency required in all parts of the art.

GENTLEMEN,

I PURPOSE to carry on in this Discourse the subject which I began in my last. It was my wish upon that occasion to incite you to pursue the higher excellencies of the art. But I fear that in this particular I have been misunderstood. Some are ready to imagine, when any of their favourite acquirements in the art are properly classed, that they are utterly disgraced. This is a very

great mistake : nothing has its proper lustre but in its proper place. That which is most worthy of esteem in its allotted sphere, becomes an object, not of respect, but of derision, when it is forced into a higher, to which it is not suited ; and there it becomes doubly a source of disorder, by occupying a situation which is not natural to it, and by putting down from the first place what is in reality of too much magnitude to become with grace and proportion that subordinate station, to which something of less value would be much better suited.

My advice in a word is this : keep your principal attention fixed upon the higher excellencies. If you compass them, and compass nothing more, you are still in the first class. We may regret the innumerable beauties which you may want ; you may be very imperfect ; but still, you are an imperfect artist of the highest order.

If, when you have got thus far, you can add any, or all, of the subordinate qualifications, it is my wish and advice that you should not neglect them. But this is as much a matter of circumspection and caution at least, as of eagerness and pursuit.

The mind is apt to be distracted by a multiplicity of objects ; and that scale of perfection which I wish always to be preserved, is in the greatest danger of being totally disordered, and even inverted.

Some excellencies bear to be united, and are improved by union ; others are of a discordant

nature; and the attempt to join them, only produces a harsh jarring of incongruent principles. The attempt to unite contrary excellencies (of form, for instance) in a single figure, can never escape degenerating into the monstrous, but by sinking into the insipid; by taking away its marked character, and weakening its expression.

This remark is true to a certain degree with regard to the passions. If you mean to preserve the most perfect beauty *in its most perfect state*, you cannot express the passions, all of which produce distortion and deformity, more or less in the most beautiful faces.

Guido, from want of choice in adapting his subject to his ideas and his powers, or from attempting to preserve beauty where it could not be preserved, has in this respect succeeded very ill. His figures are often engaged in subjects that required great expression: yet his Judith and Holofernes, the daughter of Herodias with the Baptist's head, the Andromeda, and some even of the Mothers of the Innocents, have little more expression than his Venus attired by the Graces.

Obvious as these remarks appear, there are many writers on our art, who, not being of the profession, and consequently not knowing what can or cannot be done, have been very liberal of absurd praises in their descriptions of favourite works. They always find in them what they are resolved to find. They praise excellencies that can hardly exist to-

gether ; and above all things are fond of describing with great exactness the expression of a mixed passion, which more particularly appears to me out of the reach of our art.

Such are many disquisitions which I have read on some of the Cartoons and other pictures of Raffaele, where the critics have described their own imaginations ; or indeed where the excellent master himself may have attempted this expression of passions above the powers of the art ; and has, therefore, by an indistinct and imperfect marking, left room for every imagination, with equal probability to find a passion of his own. What has been, and what can be done in the art, is sufficiently difficult ; we need not be mortified or discouraged at not being able to execute the conceptions of a romantic imagination. Art has its boundaries, though imagination has none. We can easily, like the ancients, suppose a Jupiter to be possessed of all those powers and perfections which the subordinate Deities were endowed with separately. Yet, when they employed their art to represent him, they confined his character to majesty alone. Pliny, therefore, though we are under great obligations to him for the information he has given us in relation to the works of the ancient artists, is very frequently wrong when he speaks of them, which he does very often in the style of many of our modern connoisseurs. He observes, that in a statue of Paris, by Euphranor, you might discover

at the same time three different characters; the dignity of a Judge of the Goddesses, the Lover of Helen, and the Conqueror of Achilles. A statue in which you endeavour to unite stately dignity, youthful elegance, and stern valour, must surely possess none of these to any eminent degree.

From hence it appears, that there is much difficulty as well as danger, in an endeavour to concentrate in a single subject those various powers, which rising from different points, naturally move in different directions.

The summit of excellence seems to be an assemblage of contrary qualities, but mixed, in such proportions, that no one part is found to counteract the other. How hard this is to be attained in every art, those only know, who have made the greatest progress in their respective professions.

To conclude what I have to say on this part of the subject, which I think of great importance, I wish you to understand, that I do not discourage the younger students from the noble attempt of uniting all the excellencies of art; but suggest to them, that, beside the difficulties which attend every arduous attempt, there is a peculiar difficulty in the choice of the excellencies which ought to be united. I wish you to attend to this, that you may try yourselves, whenever you are capable of that trial, what you can, and what you cannot do; and that, instead of dissipating your natural faculties over the immense field of possible excellence,

you may choose some particular walk in which you may exercise all your powers : in order that each of you may become the first in his way. If any man shall be master of such a transcendant, commanding, and ductile genius, as to enable him to rise to the highest, and to stoop to the lowest, flights of art, and to sweep over all of them unobstructed and secure, he is fitter to give example than to receive instruction.

Having said thus much on the *union* of excellencies, I will next say something of the subordination in which various excellencies ought to be kept.

I am of opinion, that the ornamental style, which in my discourse of last year I cautioned you against considering as *principal*, may not be wholly unworthy the attention even of those who aim at the grand style, when it is properly placed and properly reduced.

But this study will be used with far better effect, if its principles are employed in softening the harshness and mitigating the rigour of the great style, than if it attempt to stand forward with any pretensions of its own to positive and original excellence. It was thus Ludovico Caracci, whose example I formerly recommended to you, employed it. He was acquainted with the works both of Correggio and the Venetian painters, and knew the principles by which they produced those pleasing effects which at the first glance prepossess

us so much in their favour; but he took only as much from each as would embellish, but not overpower, that manly strength and energy of style, which is his peculiar character.

Since I have already expatiated so largely in my former discourse, and in my present, upon the *styles and characters* of painting, it will not be at all unsuitable to my subject if I mention to you some particulars relative to the leading principles, and capital works, of those who excelled in the *great style*; that I may bring you from abstraction nearer to practice, and by exemplifying the positions which I have laid down, enable you to understand more clearly what I would enforce.

The principal works of modern art are in *fresco*, a mode of painting which excludes attention to minute elegancies: yet these works in fresco, are the productions on which the fame of the greatest masters depends: such are the pictures of Michael Angelo and Raffaele in the Vatican; to which we may add the Cartoons; which, though not strictly to be called fresco, yet may be put under that denomination; and such are the works of Giulio Romano at Mantua. If these performances were destroyed, with them would be lost the best part of the reputation of those illustrious painters; for these are justly considered as the greatest efforts of our art which the world can boast. To these, therefore, we should principally direct our attention for higher excellencies. As for the lower arts, as

they have been once discovered, they may be easily attained by those possessed of the former.

Raffaëlle, who stands in general foremost of the first painters, owes his reputation, as I have observed, to his excellence in the higher parts of the art: his works in *fresco*, therefore, ought to be the first object of our study and attention. His easel-works stand in a lower degree of estimation: for though he continually, to the day of his death, embellished his performances more and more with the addition of those lower ornaments, which entirely make the merit of some painters, yet he never arrived at such perfection as to make him an object of imitation. He never was able to conquer perfectly that dryness, or even littleness of manner, which he inherited from his master. He never acquired that nicety of taste in colours, that breadth of light and shadow, that art and management of uniting light to light, and shadow to shadow, so as to make the object rise out of the ground with the plenitude of effect so much admired in the works of Correggio. When he painted in oil, his hand seemed to be so cramped and confined, that he not only lost that facility and spirit, but I think even that correctness of form, which is so perfect and admirable in his *fresco* works. I do not recollect any pictures of his of this kind, except perhaps *The Transfiguration*, in which there are not some parts that appear to be even feebly drawn. That this is not a necessary

attendant on oil-painting, we have abundant instances in more modern painters. Ludovico Caracci, for instance, preserved in his works in oil, the same spirit, vigour, and correctness which he had in fresco. I have no desire to degrade Raffaello from the high rank which he deservedly holds; but by comparing him with himself he does not appear to me to be the same man in oil as in fresco.

From those who have ambition to tread in this great walk of the art, Michael Angelo claims the next attention. He did not possess so many excellencies as Raffaello, but those which he had were of the highest kind. He considered the art as consisting of little more than what may be attained by sculpture: correctness of form, and energy of character. We ought not to expect more than an artist intends in his works. He never attempted those lesser elegancies and graces in the art. Vasari says, he never painted but one picture in oil, and resolved never to paint another, saying, it was an employment only fit for women and children.

If any man had a right to look down upon the lower accomplishments as beneath his attention, it was certainly Michael Angelo; nor can it be thought strange, that such a mind should have slighted or have been withheld from paying due attention to all those graces and embellishments of art, which have diffused such lustre over the works of other painters.

It must be acknowledged, however, that together with these, which we wish he had more attended to, he has rejected all the false, though specious, ornaments, which disgrace the works even of the most esteemed artists; and I will venture to say, that when those higher excellencies are more known and cultivated by the artists and the patrons of arts, his fame and credit will increase with our increasing knowledge. His name will then be held in the same veneration as it was in the enlightened age of Leo the Tenth: and it is remarkable that the reputation of this truly great man has been continually declining as the art itself has declined. For I must remark to you, that it has long been much on the decline, and that our only hope of its revival will consist in your being thoroughly sensible of its deprivation and decay. It is to Michael Angelo, that we owe even the existence of Raffaele: it is to him Raffaele owes the grandeur of his style. He was taught by him to elevate his thoughts, and to conceive his subjects with dignity. His genius, however, formed to blaze and to shine, might, like fire in combustible matter, for ever have lain dormant, if it had not caught a spark by its contact with Michael Angelo; and though it never burst out with *his* extraordinary heat and vehemence, yet it must be acknowledged to be a more pure, regular, and chaste flame. Though our judgment must, upon the whole, decide in favour of Raffaele, yet he never takes such a firm hold and entire pos-

session of the mind as to make us desire nothing else, and to feel nothing wanting. The effect of the capital works of Michael Angelo perfectly corresponds to what Bouchardon said (he felt from reading Homer ; his whole frame appeared to himself to be enlarged, and all nature which surrounded him, diminished to atoms.

If we put these great artists in a light of comparison with each other, Raffaelle had more taste and fancy ; Michael Angelo more genius and imagination. The one excelled in beauty, the other in energy. Michael Angelo has more of the poetical inspiration ; his ideas are vast and sublime ; his people are a superior order of beings ; there is nothing about them, nothing in the air of their actions or their attitudes, or the style and cast of their limbs or features, that reminds us of their belonging to our own species. Raffaelle's imagination is not so elevated ; his figures are not so much disjoined from our own diminutive race of beings, though his ideas are chaste, noble, and of great conformity to their subjects. Michael Angelo's works have a strong, peculiar, and marked character : they seem to proceed from his own mind entirely, and that mind so rich and abundant, that he never needed, or seemed to disdain, to look abroad for foreign help. Raffaelle's materials are generally borrowed, though the noble structure is his own. The excellency of this extraordinary man lay in the propriety, beauty, and majesty of

his characters, the judicious contrivance of his composition, his correctness of drawing, purity of taste, and skilful accommodation of other men's conceptions to his own purpose. Nobody excelled him in that judgment, with which he united to his own observations on Nature, the energy of Michael Angelo, and the beauty and simplicity of the Antique. To the question therefore, which ought to hold the first rank, Raffaellé or Michael Angelo, it must be answered, that if it is to be given to him who possessed a greater combination of the higher qualities of the art than any other man, there is no doubt but Raffaellé is the first. But if, as Longinus thinks, the sublime, being the highest excellence that human composition can attain to, abundantly compensates the absence of every other beauty, and atones for all other deficiencies, then Michael Angelo demands the preference.

These two extraordinary men carried some of the higher excellencies of the art to a greater degree of perfection than probably they ever arrived at before. They certainly have not been excelled, nor equalled since. Many of their successors were induced to leave this great road as a beaten path, endeavouring to surprise and please by something uncommon or new. When this desire of novelty has proceeded from mere idleness or caprice, it is not worth the trouble of criticism; but when it has been the result of a busy mind of

a peculiar complexion, it is always striking and interesting, never insipid.

Such is the great style, as it appears in those who possessed it at its height: in this, search after novelty, inconception, or in treating the subject, has no place.

But there is another style, which, though inferior to the former, has still great merit, because it shows that those who cultivated it were men of lively and vigorous imagination. This, which may be called the original or characteristical style, being less referred to any true archetype existing either in general or particular nature, must be supported by the painter's consistency in the principles which he has assumed, and in the union and harmony of his whole design. The excellency of every style, but of the subordinate styles more especially, will very much depend on preserving that union and harmony between all the component parts, that they may appear to hang well together, as if the whole proceeded from one mind. It is in the works of art as in the characters of men. The faults or defects of some men seem to become them, when they appear to be the natural growth and of a piece with the rest of their character. A faithful picture of a mind, though it be not of the most elevated kind, though it be irregular, wild, and incorrect, yet if it be marked with that spirit and firmness which characterise works of genius, will claim attention, and be more

striking than a combination of excellencies that do not seem to unite well together; or we may say, than a work that possesses even all excellencies, but those in a moderate degree.

One of the strongest marked characters of this kind, which must be allowed to be subordinate to the great style, is that of Salvator Rosa. He gives us a peculiar cast of nature, which, though void of all grace, elegance, and simplicity, though it has nothing of that elevation and dignity which belongs to the grand style, yet, has that sort of dignity which belongs to savage and uncultivated nature: but what is most to be admired in him, is, the perfect correspondence which he observed between the subjects which he chose, and his manner of treating them. Every thing is of a piece: his rocks, trees, sky, even to his handling, have the same rude and wild character which animates his figures.

With him we may contrast the character of Carlo Maratti, who, in my opinion, had no great vigour of mind or strength of original genius. He rarely seizes the imagination by exhibiting the higher excellencies, nor does he captivate us by that originality which attends the painter who thinks for himself. He knew and practised all the rules of art, and from a composition of Raffaele, Caracci, and Guido, made up a style, of which the only fault was, that it had no manifest defects and no striking beauties; and that the

principles of his composition are never blended together, so as to form one uniform body, original in its kind, or excellent in any view.

I will mention two other painters, who, though entirely dissimilar, yet by being each consistent with himself, and possessing a manner entirely his own, have both gained reputation, though for very opposite accomplishments. The painters I mean, are Rubens and Poussin. Rubens I mention in this place, as I think him a remarkable instance of the same mind being seen in all the various parts of the art. The whole is so much of a piece, that one can scarce be brought to believe but that if any one of the qualities he possessed had been more correct and perfect, his works would not have been so complete as they now appear. If we should allow him a greater purity and correctness of drawing, his want of simplicity in composition, colouring, and drapery, would appear more gross.

In his composition his art is too apparent. His figures have expression, and act with energy, but without simplicity or dignity. His colouring, in which he is eminently skilled, is notwithstanding too much of what we call tinted. Throughout the whole of his works, there is a proportionable want of that nicety of distinction and elegance of mind, which is required in the higher walks of painting: and to this want it may be in some degree ascribed that those qualities which make the excellency of

this subordinate style, appear in him with their greatest lustre. Indeed the facility with which he invented, the richness of his composition, the luxuriant harmony and brilliancy of his colouring, so dazzle the eye, that whilst his works continue before us, we cannot help thinking that all his deficiencies are fully supplied.*

Opposed to this florid, careless, loose, and inaccurate style, that of the simple, careful, pure, and correct style of Poussin, seems to be a complete contrast. Yet however opposite their characters, in one thing they agreed; both of them always preserving a perfect correspondence between all the parts of their respective manners: insomuch that it may be doubted whether any alteration of what is considered as defective in either, would not destroy the effect of the whole.

Poussin lived and conversed with the ancient statues so long, that he may be said to have been better acquainted with them than with the people who were about him. I have thought that he carried his veneration for them so far as to wish to give his works the air of Ancient Paintings. It is certain he copied some of the Antique Paintings, particularly The Marriage in the Aldobrandini Palace at Rome, which I believe to be the best

* A more detailed character of Rubens may be found in the "Journey to Flanders and Holland," near the conclusion. M.

relique of those remote ages that has yet been found.

No works of any modern have so much of the air of Antique Painting as those of Poussin. His best performances have a remarkable dryness of manner, which though by no means to be recommended for imitation, yet seems perfectly correspondent to that ancient simplicity which distinguishes his style. Like Polidoro he studied the ancients so much that he acquired a habit of thinking in their way, and seemed to know perfectly the actions and gestures they would use on every occasion.

Poussin in the latter part of his life changed from his dry manner to one much softer and richer, where there is a greater union between the figures and ground; as in *The Seven Sacraments* in the Duke of Orleans' collection; but neither these, nor any of his other pictures in this manner, are at all comparable to many in this dry manner which we have in England.

The favourite subjects of Poussin were Ancient Fables; and no painter was ever better qualified to paint such subjects, not only from his being eminently skilled in the knowledge of the ceremonies, customs, and habits of the ancients, but from his being so well acquainted with the different characters which those who invented them gave to their allegorical figures. Though Rubens has shown great fancy in his *Satyrs*, *Silenuses*, and

Fauns, yet they are not that distinct separate class of beings, which is carefully exhibited by the ancients, and by Poussin. Certainly when such subjects of antiquity are represented, nothing in the picture ought to remind us of modern times. The mind is thrown back into antiquity, and nothing ought to be introduced that may tend to awaken it from the illusion.

Poussin seemed to think that the style and the language in which such stories are told, is not the worse for preserving some relish of the old way of painting, which seemed to give a general uniformity to the whole, so that the mind was thrown back into antiquity not only by the subject, but the execution.

If Poussin in imitation of the ancients represents Apollo driving his chariot out of the sea by way of representing the Sun rising, if he personifies Lakes and Rivers, it is nowise offensive in him; but seems perfectly of a piece with the general air of the picture. On the contrary, if the figures which people his pictures had a modern air or countenance, if they appeared like our countrymen, if the draperies were like cloth or silk of our manufacture, if the landscape had the appearance of a modern view, how ridiculous would Apollo appear instead of the Sun; an old Man, or a Nymph with an urn, to represent a River or a Lake?

I cannot avoid mentioning here a circumstance in portrait painting, which may help to confirm

what has been said. When a portrait is painted in the historical style, as it is neither an exact minute representation of an individual, nor completely ideal, every circumstance ought to correspond to this mixture. The simplicity of the antique air and attitude, however much to be admired, is ridiculous when joined to a figure in a modern dress. It is not to my purpose to enter into the question at present, whether this mixed style ought to be adopted or not; yet if it is chosen, it is necessary it should be complete and all of a piece: the difference of stuffs, for instance, which make the clothing, should be distinguished in the same degree as the head deviates from a general idea. Without this union, which I have so often recommended, a work can have no marked and determined character, which is the peculiar and constant evidence of genius. But when this is accomplished to a high degree, it becomes in some sort a rival to that style which we have fixed as the highest.

Thus I have given a sketch of the characters of Rubens and Salvator Rosa, as they appear to me to have the greatest uniformity of mind throughout their whole work. But we may add to these, all those artists who are at the head of a class, and have had a school of imitators from Michael Angelo down to Watteau. Upon the whole it appears that, setting aside the ornamental style, there are two different modes, either of which a student may adopt without degrading the dignity of his art.

The object of the first is, to combine the higher excellencies and embellish them to the greatest advantage : of the other, to carry one of these excellencies to the highest degree. But those who possess neither, must be classed with them, who, as Shakspeare says, are "*Men of no mark or likelihood.*"

I inculcate as frequently as I can your forming yourselves upon great principles and great models. Your time will be much misspent in every other pursuit. Small excellencies should be viewed, not studied ; they ought to be viewed, because nothing ought to escape a painter's observation ; but for no other reason.

There is another caution which I wish to give you. Be as select in those whom you endeavour to please, as in those whom you endeavour to imitate. Without the love of fame you can never do any thing excellent ; but by an excessive and undistinguishing thirst after it, you will come to have vulgar views ; you will degrade your style ; and your taste will be entirely corrupted. It is certain that the lowest style will be the most popular, as it falls within the compass of ignorance itself ; and the vulgar will always be pleased with what is natural, in the confined and misunderstood sense of the word.

One would wish that such depravation of taste should be counteracted with that manly pride which actuated Euripides when he said to the Athenians

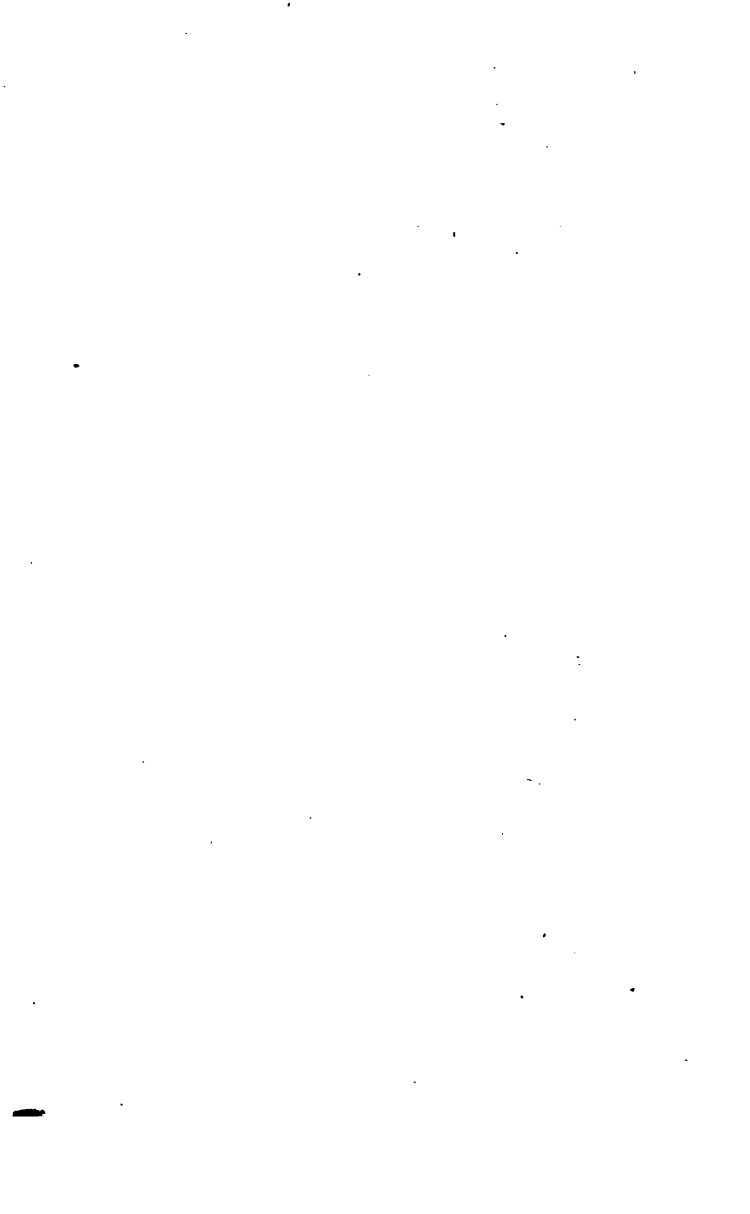
who criticised his works, “ I do not compose my “ works in order to be corrected by you, but to “ instruct you.” It is true, to have a right to speak thus, a man must be an Euripides. However, thus much may be allowed, that when an artist is sure that he is upon firm ground, supported by the authority and practice of his predecessors of the greatest reputation, he may then assume the boldness and intrepidity of genius ; at any rate he must not be tempted out of the right path by any allure-ment of popularity, which always accompanies the lower styles of painting.

I mention this, because our exhibitions, while they produce such admirable effects by nourishing emulation, and calling out genius, have also a mischievous tendency, by seducing the painter to an ambition of pleasing indiscriminately, the mixed multitude of people who resort to them.



DISCOURSE VI.

**DELIVERED TO THE STUDENTS OF
THE ROYAL ACADEMY,
ON THE
DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRIZES,
DECEMBER 10, 1774.**



DISCOURSE VI.

Imitation.—Genius begins where Rules end.—Invention acquired by being conversant with the inventions of others.—The true method of imitating.—Borrowing, how far allowable.—Something to be gathered from every school.

GENTLEMEN,

WHEN I have taken the liberty of addressing you on the course and order of your studies, I never proposed to enter into a minute detail of the art. This I have always left to the several professors, who pursue the end of our institution with the highest honour to themselves, and with the greatest advantage to the students.

My purpose in the Discourses I have held in the Academy, has been to lay down certain general positions, which seem to me proper for the formation of a sound taste : principles necessary to guard the pupils against those errors, into which the sanguine temper, common to their time of life, has a tendency to lead them ; and which have rendered abortive the hopes of so many successions of promising

young men in all parts of Europe. I wished also to intercept and suppress those prejudices which particularly prevail when the mechanism of painting is come to its perfection ; and which, when they do prevail, are certain utterly to destroy the higher and more valuable parts of this literate and liberal profession.

These two have been my principal purposes ; they are still as much my concern as ever ; and if I repeat my own notions on the subject, you who know how fast mistake and prejudice, when neglected, gain ground upon truth and reason, will easily excuse me. I only attempt to set the same thing in the greatest variety of lights.

The subject of this Discourse will be Imitation, as far as a painter is concerned in it. By imitation, I do not mean imitation in its largest sense, but simply the following of other masters, and the advantage to be drawn from the study of their works.

Those who have undertaken to write on our art, and have represented it as a kind of *inspiration*, as a *gift* bestowed upon peculiar favourites at their birth, seem to insure a much more favourable disposition from their readers, and have a much more captivating and liberal air, than he who attempts to examine, coldly, whether there are any means by which this art may be acquired ; how the mind may be strengthened and expanded, and what guides will show the way to eminence.

It is very natural for those who are unacquainted with the *cause* of any thing extraordinary, to be astonished at the *effect*, and to consider it as a kind of magic. They, who have never observed the gradation by which art is acquired, who see only what is the full result of long labour and application of an infinite number and infinite variety of acts, are apt to conclude, from their entire inability to do the same at once, that it is not only inaccessible to themselves, but can be done by those only who have some gift of the nature of inspiration bestowed upon them.

The travellers into the East tell us, that when the ignorant inhabitants of those countries are asked concerning the ruins of stately edifices yet remaining amongst them, the melancholy monuments of their former grandeur and long-lost science, they always answer, that they were built by magicians. The untaught mind finds a vast gulph between its own powers, and those works of complicated art, which it is utterly unable to fathom; and it supposes that such a void can be passed only by supernatural powers.

And, as for artists themselves, it is by no means their interest to undeceive such judges, however conscious they may be of the very natural means by which their extraordinary powers were acquired; though our art, being intrinsically imitative, rejects this idea of inspiration, more perhaps than any other.

It is to avoid this plain confession of truth, as it should seem, that this imitation of masters, indeed almost all imitation, which implies a more regular and progressive method of attaining the ends of painting, has ever been particularly inveighed against with great keenness, both by ancient and modern writers.

To derive all from native power, to owe nothing to another, is the praise which men, who do not much think on what they are saying, bestow sometimes upon others, and sometimes on themselves; and their imaginary dignity is naturally heightened by a supercilious censure of the low, the barren, the grovelling, the servile imitator. It would be no wonder if a student, frightened by these terrific and disgraceful epithets, with which the poor imitators are so often loaded, should let fall his pencil in mere despair; (conscious as he must be, how much he has been indebted to the labours of others, how little, how very little of his art was born with him;) and consider it as hopeless, to set about acquiring by the imitation of any human master, what he is taught to suppose is matter of inspiration from Heaven.

Some allowance must be made for what is said in the gaiety of rhetoric. We cannot suppose that any one can really mean to exclude all imitation of others. A position so wild would scarce deserve a serious answer; for it is apparent, if we were forbid to make use of the advantages which our

predecessors afford us, the art would be always to begin, and consequently remain always in its infant state ; and it is a common observation, that no art was ever invented and carried to perfection at the same time.

But to bring us entirely to reason and sobriety, let it be observed, that a painter must not only be of necessity an imitator of the works of nature, which alone is sufficient to dispel this phantom of inspiration, but he must be as necessarily an imitator of the works of other painters : this appears more humiliating, but is equally true ; and no man can be an artist, whatever he may suppose, upon any other terms.

However, those who appear more moderate and reasonable, allow, that our study is to begin by imitation ; but maintain that we should no longer use the thoughts of our predecessors, when we are become able to think for ourselves. They hold that imitation is as hurtful to the more advanced student, as it was advantageous to the beginner.

For my own part, I confess, I am not only very much disposed to maintain the absolute necessity of imitation in the first stages of the art ; but am of opinion, that the study of other masters, which I here call imitation, may be extended throughout our whole lives, without any danger of the inconveniencies with which it is charged, of enfeebling the mind, or preventing us from giving that original air which every work undoubtedly ought always to have.

I am, on the contrary, persuaded that by imitation only, variety, and even originality of invention, is produced. I will go further—even genius, at least what generally is so called, is the child of imitation. But as this appears to be contrary to the general opinion, I must explain my position before I enforce it.

Genius is supposed to be a power of producing excellencies, which are out of the reach of the rules of art ; a power which no precepts can teach, and which no industry can acquire.

This opinion of the impossibility of acquiring those beauties, which stamp the work with the character of genius, supposes that it is something more fixed, than in reality it is ; and that we always do, and ever did agree in opinion, with respect to what should be considered as the characteristic of genius. But the truth is, that the *degree* of excellence which proclaims *genius*, is different, in different times and different places ; and what shows it to be so, is, that mankind have often changed their opinion upon this matter.

When the arts were in their infancy, the power of merely drawing the likeness of any object, was considered as one of its greatest efforts. The common people, ignorant of the principles of art, talk the same language even to this day. But when it was found that every man could be taught to do this, and a great deal more, merely by the observance of certain precepts ; the name of genius then shifted its

application, and was given only to him who added the peculiar character of the object he represented; to him who had invention, expression, grace, or dignity; in short, those qualities, or excellencies, the power of producing which could not *then* be taught by any known and promulgated rules.

We are very sure that the beauty of form, the expression of the passions, the art of composition, even the power of giving a general air of grandeur to a work, is at present very much under the dominion of rules. These excellencies were, heretofore, considered merely as the effects of genius; and justly, if genius is not taken for inspiration, but as the effect of close observation and experience.

He who first made any of these observations, and digested them, so as to form an invariable principle for himself to work by, had that merit, but probably no one went very far at once; and generally, the first who gave the hint, did not know how to pursue it steadily and methodically; at least not in the beginning. He himself worked on it, and improved it; others worked more, and improved further; until the secret was discovered, and the practice made as general, as refined practice can be made. How many more principles may be fixed and ascertained, we cannot tell; but as criticism is likely to go hand in hand with the art which is its subject, we may venture to say, that as that art shall advance, its powers will be still more and more fixed by rules.

But by whatever strides criticism may gain ground, we need be under no apprehension, that invention will ever be annihilated, or subdued ; or intellectual energy be brought entirely within the restraint of written law. Genius will still have room enough to expatiate, and keep always at the same distance from narrow comprehension and mechanical performance.

What we now call genius, begins, not where rules, abstractedly taken, end ; but where known vulgar and trite rules have no longer any place. It must of necessity be, that even works of genius, like every other effect, as they must have their cause, must likewise have their rules ; it cannot be by chance, that excellencies are produced with any constancy or any certainty, for this is not the nature of chance ; but the rules by which men of extraordinary parts, and such as are called men of genius, work, are either such as they discover by their own peculiar observations, or of such a nice texture as not easily to admit being expressed in words ; especially as artists are not very frequently skilful in that mode of communicating ideas. Unsubstantial, however, as these rules may seem, and difficult as it may be to convey them in writing, they are still seen and felt in the mind of the artist ; and he works from them with as much certainty, as if they were embodied, as I may say, upon paper. It is true, these refined principles cannot be always made palpable like the

more gross rules of art ; yet it does not follow, but that the mind may be put in such a train, that it shall perceive, by a kind of scientific sense, that propriety, which words, particularly words of unpracticed writers, such as we are, can but very feebly suggest.

Invention is one of the great marks of genius ; but if we consult experience, we shall find, that it is by being conversant with the inventions of others, that we learn to invent ; as by reading the thoughts of others we learn to think.

Whoever has so far formed his taste, as to be able to relish and feel the beauties of the great masters, has gone a great way in his study ; for, merely from a consciousness of this relish of the right, the mind swells with an inward pride, and is almost as powerfully affected, as if it had itself produced what it admires. Our hearts, frequently warmed in this manner by the contact of those whom we wish to resemble, will undoubtedly catch something of their way of thinking ; and we shall receive in our own bosoms some radiation at least of their fire and splendour. That disposition, which is so strong in children, still continues with us, of catching involuntarily the general air and manner of those with whom we are most conversant ; with this difference, only, that a young mind is naturally pliable and imitative ; but in a more advanced state it grows rigid, and must be warmed and softened, before it will receive a deep impression.

From these considerations, which a little of your own reflection will carry a great way further, it appears, of what great consequence it is, that our minds should be habituated to the contemplation of excellence; and that, far from being contented to make such habits the discipline of our youth only, we should, to the last moment of our lives, continue a settled intercourse with all the true examples of grandeur. Their inventions are not only the food of our infancy, but the substance which supplies the fullest maturity of our vigor.

The mind is but a barren soil which is soon exhausted, and will produce no crop, or only one, unless it be continually fertilized and enriched with foreign matter.

When we have had continually before us the great works of art to impregnate our minds with kindred ideas, we are then, and not till then, fit to produce something of the same species. We behold all about us with the eyes of those penetrating observers whose works we contemplate; and our minds, accustomed to think the thoughts of the noblest and brightest intellects, are prepared for the discovery and selection of all that is great and noble in nature. The greatest natural genius cannot subsist on its own stock: he who resolves never to ransack any mind but his own, will be soon reduced, from mere barrenness, to the poorest of all imitations; he will be obliged to imitate himself, and to repeat what he has before often

repeated. When we know the subject designed by such men, it will never be difficult to guess what kind of work is to be produced.

It is vain for painters or poets to endeavour to invent without materials on which the mind may work, and from which invention must originate. Nothing can come of nothing.

Homer is supposed to be possessed of all the learning of his time; and we are certain that Michael Angelo, and Raffaello, were equally possessed of all the knowledge in the art which had been discovered in the works of their predecessors.

A mind enriched by an assemblage of all the treasures of ancient and modern art, will be more elevated and fruitful in resources, in proportion to the number of ideas which have been carefully collected and thoroughly digested. There can be no doubt but that he who has the most materials has the greatest means of invention; and if he has not the power of using them, it must proceed from a feebleness of intellect, or from the confused manner in which those collections have been laid up in his mind.

The addition of other men's judgment is so far from weakening our own, as is the opinion of many, that it will fashion and consolidate those ideas of excellence which lay in embryo, feeble, ill-shaped, and confused, but which are finished and put in order by the authority and practice of

those whose works may be said to have been consecrated by having stood the test of ages.

The mind, or genius, has been compared to a spark of fire, which is smothered by a heap of fuel, and prevented from blazing into a flame. This simile, which is made use of by the younger Pliny, may be easily mistaken for argument or proof. But there is no danger of the mind's being over-burthened with knowledge, or the genius extinguished by any addition of images; on the contrary, these acquisitions may as well, perhaps better, be compared, if comparisons signified any thing in reasoning, to the supply of living embers, which will contribute to strengthen the spark, that without the association of more fuel would have died away. The truth is, he whose feebleness is such, as to make other men's thoughts an incumbrance to him, can have no very great strength of mind or genius of his own to be destroyed; so that not much harm will be done at worst.

We may oppose to Pliny the greater authority of Cicero, who is continually enforcing the necessity of this method of study. In his dialogue on oratory, he makes Crassus say, that one of the first and most important precepts is, to choose a proper model for our imitation. *Hoc sit primum in præceptis meis, ut demonstremus quem imitemur.*

When I speak of the habitual imitation and continued study of masters, it is not to be understood, that I advise any endeavour to copy the exact

peculiar colour and complexion of another man's mind ; the success of such an attempt must always be like his, who imitates exactly, the air, manner, and gestures, of him whom he admires. His model may be excellent, but the copy will be ridiculous : this ridicule does not arise from his having imitated, but from his not having chosen the right mode of imitation.

It is a necessary and warrantable pride to disdain to walk servilely behind any individual, however elevated his rank. The true and liberal ground of imitation is an open field ; where, though he who precedes has had the advantage of starting before you, you may always propose to overtake him : it is enough however to pursue his course ; you need not tread in his footsteps ; and you certainly have a right to outstrip him if you can.

Nor, whilst I recommend studying the art from artists, can I be supposed to mean, that nature is to be neglected : I take this study in aid, and not in exclusion, of the other. Nature is, and must be the fountain which alone is inexhaustible ; and from which all excellencies must originally flow.

The great use of studying our predecessors is, to open the mind, to shorten our labour, and to give us the result of the selection made by those great minds of what is grand or beautiful in nature ; her rich stores are all spread out before us ; but it is an art, and no easy art, to know how or what to choose, and how to attain and secure the object of

our choice. Thus the highest beauty of form must be taken from nature ; but it is an art of long deduction and great experience, to know how to find it. We must not content ourselves with merely admiring and relishing ; we must enter into the principles on which the work is wrought : these do not swim on the superficies, and consequently are not open to superficial observers.

Art in its perfection is not ostentatious : it lies hid, and works its effect, itself unseen. It is the proper study and labour of an artist to uncover and find out the latent cause of conspicuous beauties, and from thence form principles of his own conduct : such an examination is a continual exertion of the mind ; as great, perhaps, as that of the artist whose works he is thus studying.

The sagacious imitator does not content himself with merely remarking what distinguishes the different manner or genius of each master ; he enters into the contrivance in the composition how the masses of lights are disposed, the means by which the effect is produced, how artfully some parts are lost in the ground, others boldly relieved, and how all these are mutually altered and interchanged according to the reason and scheme of the work. He admires not the harmony of colouring alone, but examines by what artifice one colour is a foil to its neighbour. He looks close into the tints, examines of what colours they are composed, till he has formed clear and distinct ideas, and has

learned to see in what harmony and good colouring consists. What is learned in this manner from the works of others becomes really our own, sinks deep, and is never forgotten; nay, it is by seizing on this clue that we proceed forward, and get further and further in enlarging the principles and improving the practice of our art.

There can be no doubt, but the art is better learned from the works themselves, than from the precepts which are formed upon those works; but if it is difficult to choose proper models for imitation, it requires no less circumspection to separate and distinguish what in those models we ought to imitate.

I cannot avoid mentioning here, though it is not my intention at present to enter into the art and method of study, an error which students are too apt to fall into. He that is forming himself, must look with great caution and wariness on those peculiarities, or prominent parts, which at first force themselves upon view; and are the marks, or what is commonly called the manner, by which that individual artist is distinguished.

Peculiar marks, I hold to be, generally, if not always, defects; however difficult it may be wholly to escape them.

Peculiarities in the works of art, are like those in the human figure: it is by them that we are cognizable, and distinguished one from another, but they are always so many blemishes, which,

however, both in real life and in painting, cease to appear deformities, to those who have them continually before their eyes. In the works of art, even the most enlightened mind, when warmed by beauties of the highest kind, will by degrees find a repugnance within him to acknowledge any defects ; nay, his enthusiasm will carry him so far, as to transform them into beauties, and objects of imitation.

It must be acknowledged, that a peculiarity of style, either from its novelty, or by seeming to proceed from a peculiar turn of mind, often escapes blame ; on the contrary, it is sometimes striking and pleasing : but this it is a vain labour to endeavour to imitate ; because novelty and peculiarity being its only merit, when it ceases to be new, it ceases to have value.

A manner therefore being a defect, and every painter, however excellent, having a manner, it seems to follow, that all kinds of faults, as well as beauties, may be learned under the sanction of the greatest authorities. Even the great name of Michael Angelo may be used, to keep in countenance a deficiency or rather neglect of colouring, and every other ornamental part of the art. If the young student is dry and hard, Poussin is the same. If his work has a careless and unfinished air, he has most of the Venetian school to support him. If he makes no selection of objects, but takes individual nature just as he finds it, he is like

Rembrandt. If he is incorrect in the proportions of his figures, Correggio was likewise incorrect. If his colours are not blended and united, Rubens was equally crude. In short, there is no defect that may not be excused, if it is a sufficient excuse that it can be imputed to considerable artists; but it must be remembered, that it was not by these defects they acquired their reputation; they have a right to our pardon, but not to our admiration.

However, to imitate peculiarities or mistake defects for beauties, that man will be most liable, who confines his imitation to one favourite master; and even though he chooses the best, and is capable of distinguishing the real excellencies of his model, it is not by such narrow practice, that a genius or mastery in the art is acquired. A man is as little likely to form a true idea of the perfection of the art, by studying a single artist, as he would be to produce a perfectly beautiful figure, by an exact imitation of any individual living model. And as the painter, by bringing together in one piece, those beauties which are dispersed among a great variety of individuals, produces a figure more beautiful than can be found in nature; so, that artist, who can unite in himself the excellencies of the various great painters, will approach nearer to perfection than any one of his masters. He who confines himself to the imitation of an individual, as he never proposes to surpass, so he is not likely to equal the object of his imitation.

He professes only to follow ; and he that follow must necessarily be behind.

We should imitate the conduct of the great artists in the course of their studies, as well as the works which they produced, when they were perfectly formed. Raffaelle began by imitating implicitly the manner of Pietro Perugino, under whom he studied ; hence his first works are scarce to be distinguished from his master's ; but soon forming higher and more extensive views, he imitated the grand outline of Michael Angelo ; he learned the manner of using colours from the works of Leonardo da Vinci, and Fratre Bartolomeo : to all this he added the contemplation of all the remains of antiquity that were within his reach ; and employed others to draw for him what was in Greece and distant places. And it is from his having taken so many models, that he became himself a model for all succeeding painters ; always imitating and always original.

If your ambition, therefore, be to equal Raffaelle, you must do as Raffaelle did, take many models, and not even *him* for your guide alone, to the exclusion of others.* And yet the number is infinite of those who seem, if one may judge by their style, to have seen no other works but those of their master, or of some favourite, whose *manner* is their first wish, and their last.

* Sed non qui maxime imitandus, etiam solus imitandus est. Quintilian.

I will mention a few that occur to me of this narrow, confined, illiberal, unscientific, and servile kind of imitators. Guido was thus meanly copied by Elizabetta, Sirani, and Simone Cantarini; Poussin, by Verdier, and Cheron; Parmeggiano, by Jeronimo Mazzuoli. Paolo Veronese, and Iacomo Bassan, had for their imitators their brothers and sons. Pietro da Cortona was followed by Ciro Ferri, and Romanelli; Rubens, by Jacques Jordaens, and Diepenbeke; Guercino, by his own family, the Gennari. Carlo Maratti was imitated by Giuseppe Chiari, and Pietro de Pietri; and Rembrandt, by Bramer, Eeckhout, and Flink. All these, to whom may be added a much longer list of painters, whose works among the ignorant, pass for those of their masters, are justly to be censured for barrenness and servility.

To oppose to this list a few that have adopted a more liberal style of imitation;—Pellegrino Tibaldi Rosso, and Primaticcio, did not coldly imitate, but caught something of the fire that animates the works of Michael Angelo. The Caraccis formed their style from Pellegrino Tibaldi, Correggio, and the Venetian School. Domenichino, Guido, Lanfranco, Albano, Guercino, Cavidone, Schidone, Tiarini, though it is sufficiently apparent that they came from the school of the Caraccis, have yet the appearance of men who extended their views beyond the

model that lay before them, and have shown that they had opinions of their own, and thought for themselves, after they had made themselves masters of the general principles of their schools.

Le Suer's first manner resembles very much that of his master Voüet : but as he soon excelled him, so he differed from him in ever part of the art. Carlo Maratti succeeded better than those I have first named, and I think owes his superiority to the extension of his views ; beside his master Andrea Sacchi, he imitated Raffaele, Guido, and the Caraccis. It is true, there is nothing very captivating in Carlo Maratti ; but this proceeded from a want which cannot be completely supplied ; that is, want of strength of parts. In this certainly, men are not equal ; and a man can bring home wares only in proportion to the capital with which he goes to market. Carlo, by diligence, made the most of what he had ; but there was undoubtedly a heaviness about him, which extended itself, uniformly, to his invention, expression, his drawing, colouring, and the general effect of his pictures. The truth is, he never equalled any of his patterns in any one thing, and he added little of his own.

But we must not rest contented even in this general study of the moderns ; we must trace back the art to its fountain head ; to that source from whence they drew their principal excellencies, the monuments of pure antiquity. All the inventions and thoughts of the ancients, whether conveyed

to us in statues, bas-reliefs, intaglios, cameos, or coins, are to be sought after and carefully studied; the genius that hovers over these venerable relics, may be called the father of modern art.

From the remains of the works of the ancients the modern arts were revived, and it is by their means that they must be restored a second time. However it may mortify our vanity, we must be forced to allow them our masters; and we may venture to prophesy, that when they shall cease to be studied, arts will no longer flourish, and we shall again relapse into barbarism.

The fire of the artist's own genius operating upon these materials which have been thus diligently collected, will enable him to make new combinations, perhaps, superior to what had ever before been in the possession of the art: as in the mixture of the variety of metals, which are said to have been melted and run together at the burning of Corinth; a new, and till then unknown metal was produced, equal in value to any of those that had contributed to its composition. And though a curious refiner should come with his crucibles, analyze and separate its various component parts, yet Corinthian brass would still hold its rank amongst the most beautiful and valuable of metals.

We have hitherto considered the advantages of imitation as it tends to form the taste, and as a practice by which a spark of that genius may be

caught, which illumines those noble works that ought always to be present to our thoughts.

We come now to speak of another kind of imitation; the borrowing a particular thought, an action, an attitude or figure, and transplanting it into your own work; this will either come under the charge of plagiarism, or be warrantable, and deserve commendation, according to the address with which it is performed. There is some difference, likewise, whether it is upon the ancients or moderns that these depredations are made. It is generally allowed, that no man need be ashamed of copying the ancients: their works are considered as a magazine of common property, always open to the public, whence every man has a right to take what materials he pleases; and if he has the art of using them, they are supposed to become to all intents and purposes his own property. The collection of the thoughts of the ancients which Raffaele made with so much trouble, is a proof of his opinion on this subject. Such collections may be made with much more ease, by means of an art scarce known in his time; I mean that of engraving; by which, at an easy rate, every man may now avail himself of the inventions of antiquity.

It must be acknowledged that the works of the moderns are more the property of their authors. He, who borrows an idea from an ancient, or even from a modern artist not his contemporary, and so accommodates it to his own work, that it makes a

part of it, with no seam or joining appearing, can hardly be charged with plagiarism; poets practice this kind of borrowing, without reserve. But an artist should not be contented with this only; he should enter into a competition with his original, and endeavour to improve what he is appropriating to his own work. Such imitation is so far from having any thing in it of the servility of plagiarism, that it is a perpetual exercise of the mind, a continual invention. Borrowing or stealing with such art and caution, will have a right to the same lenity as was used by the Lacedemonians; who did not punish theft, but the want of artifice to conceal it.

In order to encourage you to imitation, to the utmost extent, let me add, that every finished artist in the inferior branches of the art, will contribute to furnish the mind and give hints, of which a skilful painter, who is sensible of what he wants, and is in no danger of being infected by the contract of vicious models will know how to avail himself. He will pick up from dunghills, what, by a nice chemistry, passing through his own mind, shall be converted into pure gold; and under the rudeness of Gothic essays, he will find original, rational, and even sublime inventions.

The works of Albert Durer, Lucas Van Leyden, the numerous inventions of Tobias Stimmer, and Jost Ammon, afford a rich mass of genuine materials, which wrought up and polished to elegance, will add copiousness to what, perhaps, without such

aid, could have aspired only to justness and propriety.

In the luxuriant style of Paul Veronese, in the capricious compositions of Tintoret, he will find something that will assist his invention, and give points, from which his own imagination shall rise and take flight, when the subject which he treats will with propriety admit of splendid effects.

In every school, whether Venetian, French, or Dutch, he will find either ingenious compositions, extraordinary effects, some peculiar expressions, or some mechanical excellence, well worthy of his attention, and, in some measure, of his imitation. Even in the lower class of the French painters, great beauties are often found, united with great defects. Though Coypel wanted a simplicity of taste, and mistook a presumptuous and assuming air for what is grand and majestic; yet he frequently has good sense and judgment in his manner of telling his stories, great skill in his compositions, and is not without a considerable power of expressing the passions. The modern affectation of grace in his works, as well as in those of Bosch and Watteau, may be said to be separated by a very thin partition, from the more simple and pure grace of Correggio and Parmegiano.

Among the Dutch painters, the correct, firm, and determined pencil, which was employed by Bamboccio and Jean Miel, on vulgar and mean subjects, might without any change be employed on

the highest; to which indeed it seems more properly to belong. The greatest style, if that style is confined to small figures, such as Poussin generally painted, would receive an additional grace by the elegance and precision of pencil so admirable in the works of Teniers; and though the school to which he belonged more particularly excelled in the mechanism of painting, yet it produced many, who have shown great abilities in expressing what must be ranked above mechanical excellencies. In the works of Frank Hals, the portrait painter may observe the composition of a face, the features well put together, as the painters express it; from whence proceeds that strong marked character of individual nature, which is so remarkable in his portraits, and is not found in an equal degree in any other painter. If he had joined to this most difficult part of the art, a patience in finishing what he had so correctly planned, he might justly have claimed the place which Vandyck, all things considered, so justly holds as the first of portrait painters.

Others of the same school have shown great power in expressing the character and passions of those vulgar people which were the subjects of their study and attention. Among those, Jan Steen seems to be one of the most diligent and accurate observers of what passed in those scenes which he frequented, and which were to him an academy. I can easily imagine, that if this extra-

ordinary man had had the good fortune to have been born in Italy, instead of Holland; had he lived in Rome, instead of Leyden, and been blessed with Michael Angelo and Raffaele, for his masters, instead of Brouwer and Van Goyen, the same sagacity and penetration which distinguished so accurately the different characters and expression in his vulgar figures, would, when exerted in the selection and imitation of what was great and elevated in nature, have been equally successful; and he now would have ranged with the great pillars and supporters of our art.

Men who, although thus bound down by the almost invincible powers of early habits, have still exerted extraordinary abilities within their narrow and confined circle; and have, from the natural vigor of their mind, given a very interesting expression and great force and energy to their works; though they cannot be recommended to be exactly imitated, may yet invite an artist to endeavour to transfer, by a kind of parody, their excellencies to his own performances. Whoever has acquired the power of making this use of the Flemish, Venetian, and French schools, is a real genius, and has sources of knowledge open to him which were wanting to the great artists who lived in the great age of painting.

To find excellencies, however dispersed; to discover beauties, however concealed by the multitude of defects with which they are surrounded, can be

the work only of him, who having a mind always alive to his art, has extended his views to all ages and to all schools; and has acquired from that comprehensive mass which he has thus gathered to himself, a well-digested and perfect idea of his art, to which every thing is referred. Like a sovereign judge and arbiter of art, he is possessed of that presiding power which separates and attracts every excellence from every school; selects both what is great, and what is little; brings home knowledge from the East and from the West; making the universe tributary towards furnishing his mind and enriching his works with originality, and variety of inventions.

Thus I have ventured to give my opinion of what appears to me the true and only method by which an artist makes himself master of his profession; which I hold ought to be one continued course of imitation, that is not to cease but with his life.

Those, who either from their own engagements and hurry of business, or from indolence, or from conceit and vanity, have neglected looking out of themselves, as far as my experience and observation reaches, have from that time, not only ceased to advance, and improve in their performances, but have gone backward. They may be compared to men who have lived upon their principal, till they are reduced to beggary, and left without resources.

I can recommend nothing better therefore, than that you endeavour to infuse into your works what

you learn from the contemplation of the works of others. To recommend this has the appearance of needless and superfluous advice; but it has fallen within my own knowledge, that artists, though they were not wanting in a sincere love for their art, though they had great pleasure in seeing good pictures, and were well skilled to distinguish what was excellent or defective in them, yet have gone on in their own manner, without any endeavour to give a little of those beauties, which they admired in others, to their own works. It is difficult to conceive how the present Italian painters, who live in the midst of the treasures of art, should be contented with their own style. They proceed in their common-place inventions, and never think it worth while to visit the works of those great artists with which they are surrounded.

I remember, several years ago, to have conversed at Rome with an artist of great fame throughout Europe; he was not without a considerable degree of abilities, but those abilities were by no means equal to his own opinion of them. From the reputation he had acquired, he too fondly concluded that he stood in the same rank when compared with his predecessors, as he held with regard to his miserable contemporary rivals. In conversation about some particulars of the work of Raffaele, he seemed to have, or to affect to have, a very obscure memory of them. He told me that he had not set his foot in the Vatican for fifteen

years together ; that he had been in treaty to copy a capital picture of Raffaele, but that the business had gone off ; however, if the agreement had held, his copy would have greatly exceeded the original. The merit of this artist, however great we may suppose it, I am sure would have been far greater, and his presumption would have been far less, if he had visited the Vatican, as in reason he ought to have done, at least, once every month of his life.

I address myself, Gentlemen, to you who have made some progress in the art, and are to be, for the future, under the guidance of your own judgment and discretion. I consider you as arrived to that period, when you have a right to think for yourselves, and to presume that every man is fallible ; to study the masters with a suspicion, that great men are not always exempt from great faults ; to criticise, compare, and rank their works in your own estimation, as they approach to, or recede from that standard of perfection which you have formed in your own minds, but which those masters themselves, it must be remembered, have taught you to make, and which you will cease to make with correctness, when you cease to study them. It is their excellencies which have taught you their defects.

I would wish you to forget where you are, and who it is that speaks to you, I only direct you to higher models and better advisers. We can teach you here but very little ; you are henceforth to be

your own teachers. Do this justice, however, to the English Academy; to bear in mind, that in this place you contracted no narrow habits, no false ideas, nothing that could lead you to the imitation of any living master, who may be the fashionable darling of the day. As you have not been taught to flatter us, do not learn to flatter yourselves. We have endeavoured to lead you to the admiration of nothing but what is truly admirable. If you choose inferior patterns, or if you make your own *former* works your patterns for your *latter*, it is your own fault.

The purport of this Discourse, and, indeed, of most of my other Discourses, is, to caution you against that false opinion, but too prevalent among artists, of the imaginary powers of native genius, and its sufficiency in great works. This opinion, according to the temper of mind it meets with, almost always produces, either a vain confidence, or a sluggish despair, both equally fatal to all proficiency.

Study therefore the great works of the great masters, for ever. Study as nearly as you can, in the order, in the manner, and on the principles, on which they studied. Study nature attentively, but always with those masters in your company; consider them as models which you are to imitate, and at the same time as rivals with whom you are to contend.

DISCOURSE VII.

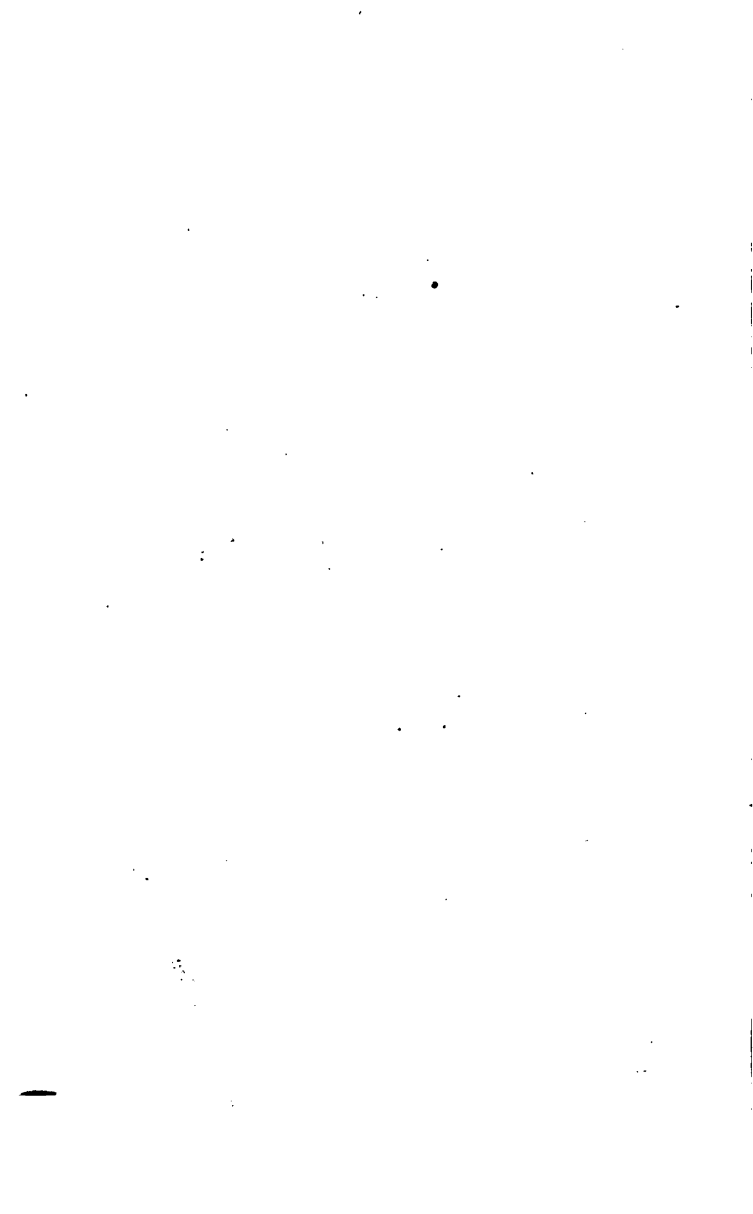
DELIVERED TO THE STUDENTS OF

THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

ON THE

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRIZES,

DECEMBER 10, 1776.



DISCOURSE VII.

The reality of a standard of Taste, as well as of corporal Beauty. Beside this immutable Truth, there are secondary Truths, which are variable; both requiring the attention of the Artist, in proportion to their stability or their influence.

GENTLEMEN,

IT has been my uniform endeavour, since I first addressed you from this place, to impress you strongly with one ruling idea. I wished you to be persuaded, that success in your art depends almost entirely on your own industry; but the industry which I principally recommended, is not the industry of the *hands*, but of the *mind*.

As our art is not a divine *gift*, so neither is it a mechanical *trade*. Its foundations are laid in solid science: and practice, though essential to perfection, can never attain that to which it aims, unless it works under the direction of principle.

Some writers upon art carry this point too far,

and suppose that such a body of universal and profound learning is requisite, that the very enumeration of its kinds is enough to frighten a beginner. Vitruvius, after going through the many accomplishments of nature, and the many acquirements of learning, necessary to an architect, proceeds with great gravity to assert that he ought to be well skilled in the civil law ; that he may not be cheated in the title of the ground he builds on. But without such exaggeration, we may go so far as to assert, that a painter stands in need of more knowledge than is to be picked off his pallet, or collected by looking on his model, whether it be in life or in picture. He can never be a great artist, who is grossly illiterate.

Every man whose business is description, ought to be tolerably conversant with the poets, in some language or other ; that he may imbibe a poetical spirit, and enlarge his stock of ideas. He ought to acquire habit of comparing and digesting his notions. He ought not to be wholly unacquainted with that part of philosophy which gives an insight into human nature, and relates to the manners, characters, passions, and affections. He ought to know *something* concerning the mind, as well as *a great deal* concerning the body of man. For this purpose, it is not necessary that he should go into such a compass of reading, as must, by distracting his attention, disqualify him for the practical part of his profession, and make him sink the

performer in the critic. Reading, if it can be made the favourite recreation of his leisure hours, will improve and enlarge his mind, without retarding his actual industry. What such partial and desultory reading cannot afford, may be supplied by the conversation of learned and ingenious men, which is the best of all substitutes for those who have not the means or opportunities of deep study. There are many such men in this age: and they will be pleased with communicating their ideas to artists, when they see them curious and docile, if they are treated with that respect and deference which is so justly their due. Into such society, young artists, if they make it the point of their ambition, will by degrees be admitted. There, without formal teaching, they will insensibly come to feel and reason like those they live with, and find a rational and systematic taste imperceptibly formed in their minds, which they will know how to reduce to a standard, by applying general truth to their own purposes, better perhaps than those to whom they owed the original sentiment.

Of these studies, and this conversation, the desire and legitimate offspring is a power of distinguishing right from wrong; which power applied to works of art, is denominated taste. Let me then, without further introduction, enter upon an examination, whether taste be so far beyond our reach as to be unattainable by care; or be so very vague and capricious, that no care ought to be employed about it.

It has been the fate of arts to be enveloped in mysterious and incomprehensible language, as if it was thought necessary that even the terms should correspond to the idea entertained of the instability and uncertainty of the rules which they expressed.

To speak of genius and taste, as in any way connected with reason or common sense, would be, in the opinion of some towering talkers, to speak like a man who possessed neither; who had never felt that enthusiasm, or, to use their own inflated language, was never warmed by that Promethean fire, which animates the canvass and vivifies the marble.

If, in order to be intelligible, I appear to degrade art by bringing her down from her visionary situation in the clouds, it is only to give her a more solid mansion upon the earth. It is necessary that at some time or other we should see things as they really are, and not impose on ourselves by that false magnitude with which objects appear when viewed indistinctly as through a mist.

We will allow a poet to express his meaning, when his meaning is not well known to himself, with a certain degree of obscurity, as it is one source of the sublime. But when, in plain prose, we gravely talk of courting the Muse in shady bowers; waiting the call and inspiration of Genius, finding out where he inhabits, and where he is to be invoked with the greatest success; of attend-

ing to times and seasons when the imagination shoots with the greatest vigour, whether at the summer solstice or the vernal equinox; sagaciously observing how much the wild freedom and liberty of imagination is cramped by attention to established rules; and how this same imagination begins to grow dim in advanced age, smothered and deadened by too much judgment; when we talk such language, or entertain such sentiments as these, we generally rest contented with mere words, or at best entertain notions not only groundless but pernicious.

If all this means, what it is very possible was originally intended only to be meant, that in order to cultivate an art, a man secludes himself from the commerce of the world, and retires into the country at particular seasons; or that at one time of the year his body is in better health, and consequently his mind fitter for the business of hard thinking than at another time; or that the mind may be fatigued and grow confused by long and unremitted application; this I can understand. I can likewise believe, that a man eminent when young for possessing poetical imagination, may, from having taken another road, so neglect its cultivation, as to show less of its powers in his latter life. But I am persuaded, that scarce a poet is to be found, from Homer down to Dryden, who preserved a sound mind in a sound body, and continued practising his profession to the very last,

whose latter works are not as replete with the fire of imagination, as those which were produced in his more youthful days.

To understand literally these metaphors, or ideas expressed in poetical language, seems to be equally absurd as to conclude, that because painters sometimes represent poets writing from the dictates of a little winged boy or genius, that this same genius did really inform him in a whisper what he was to write; and that he is himself but a mere machine, unconscious of the operations of his own mind.

Opinions generally received and floating in the world, whether true or false, we naturally adopt and make our own; they may be considered as a kind of inheritance to which we succeed and are tenants for life, and which we leave to our posterity very nearly in the condition in which we received it; it not being much in any one man's power either to impair or improve it. The greatest part of these opinions, like current coin in its circulation, we are used to take without weighing or examining; but by this inevitable inattention many adulterated pieces are received, which, when we seriously estimate our wealth, we must throw away. So the collector of popular opinions, when he embodies his knowledge, and forms a system, must separate those which are true from those which are only plausible. But it becomes more peculiarly a duty to the professors of art, not to let any opinions

relating to that art pass unexamined. The caution and circumspection required in such examination we shall presently have an opportunity of explaining.

Genius and taste, in their common acception, appear to be very nearly related; the difference lies only in this, that genius has superadded to it a habit or power of execution: or we may say, that taste, when this power is added, changes its name, and is called genius. They both, in the popular opinion, pretend to an entire exemption from the restraint of rules. It is supposed that their powers are intuitive; that under the name of genius great works are produced, and under the name of taste an exact judgment is given, without our knowing why, and without our being under the least obligation to reason, precept, or experience.

One can scarce state these opinions without exposing their absurdity; yet they are constantly in the mouths of men, and particularly of artists. They who have thought seriously on this subject, do not carry the point so far; yet I am persuaded, that even among those few who may be called thinkers, the prevalent opinion allows less than it ought to the powers of reason; and considers the principles of taste, which give all their authority to the rules of art, as more fluctuating, and as having less solid foundations, than we shall find, upon examination, they really have.

The common saying, that *tastes are not to be dis-*

puted, owes its influence, and its general reception, to the same error which leads us to imagine this faculty of too high an original to submit to the authority of an earthly tribunal. It likewise corresponds with the notions of those who consider it as a mere phantom of the imagination, so devoid of substance as to elude all criticism.

We often appear to differ in sentiments from each other, merely from the inaccuracy of terms, as we are not obliged to speak always with critical exactness. Something of this too may arise from want of words in the language in which we speak, to express the more nice discriminations which a deep investigation discovers. A great deal however of this difference vanishes, when each opinion is tolerably explained and understood by constancy and precision in the use of terms.

We apply the term Taste to that act of the mind by which we like or dislike, whatever be the subject. Our judgment upon an airy nothing, a fancy which has no foundation, is called by the same name which we give to our determination concerning those truths which refer to the most general and most unalterable principles of human nature; to works which are only to be produced by the greatest efforts of the human understanding. However inconvenient this may be, we are obliged to take words as we find them; all we can do is to distinguish the THINGS to which they are applied.

We may let pass those things which are at once subjects of taste and sense, and which having as much certainty as the senses themselves, give no occasion to inquiry or dispute. The natural appetite or taste of the human mind is for Truth; whether that truth results from the real agreement or equality of original ideas among themselves; from the agreement of the representation of any object with the thing represented; or from the correspondence of the several parts of any arrangement with each other. It is the very same taste which relishes a demonstration in geometry, that is pleased with the resemblance of a picture to an original, and touched with the harmony of music.

All these have unalterable and fixed foundations in nature, and are therefore equally investigated by reason, and known by study; some with more, some with less clearness, but all exactly in the same way. A picture that is unlike, is false. Disproportionate ordonnance of parts is not right: because it cannot be true, until it ceases to be a contradiction to assert, that the parts have no relation to the whole. Colouring is true, when it is naturally adapted to the eye, from brightness, from softness; from harmony, from resemblance; because these agree with their object, NATURE, and therefore are true; as true as mathematical demonstration; but known to be true only to those who study these things.

But beside real, there is also apparent truth,

or opinion, or prejudice. With regard to real truth, when it is known, the taste which conforms to it is, and must be, uniform. With regard to the second sort of truth, which may be called truth upon sufferance, or truth by courtesy, it is not fixed, but variable. However, whilst these opinions and prejudices, on which it is founded, continue, they operate as truth; and the art, whose office it is to please the mind as well as instruct it, must direct itself according to opinion, or it will not attain its end.

In proportion as these prejudices are known to be generally diffused, or long received, the taste which conforms to them approaches nearer to certainty, and to a sort of resemblance to real science, even where opinions are found to be no better than prejudices. And since they deserve, on account of their duration and extent, to be considered as really true, they become capable of no small degree of stability and determination, by their permanent and uniform nature.

As these prejudices become more narrow, more local, more transitory, this secondary taste becomes more and more fantastical; recedes from real science; is less to be approved by reason, and less followed in practice; though in no case perhaps to be wholly neglected, where it does not stand, as it sometimes does, in direct defiance of the most respectable opinions received amongst mankind.

Having laid down these positions, I shall proceed with less method, because less will serve to explain and apply them.

We will take it for granted, that reason is something invariable, and fixed in the nature of things ; and without endeavouring to go back to an account of first principles, which for ever will elude our search, we will conclude, that whatever goes under the name of taste, which we can fairly bring under the dominion of reason, must be considered as equally exempt from change. If, therefore, in the course of this inquiry, we can show that there are rules for the conduct of the artist which are fixed and invariable, it follows of course, that the art of the connoisseur, or, in other words, taste, has likewise invariable principles.

Of the judgment which we make on the works of art, and the preference that we give to one class of art over another, if a reason be demanded, the question is perhaps evaded by answering, I judge from my taste : but it does not follow that a better answer cannot be given, though, for common gazers, this may be sufficient. Every man is not obliged to investigate the cause of his approbation or dislike.

The arts would lie open for ever to caprice and casualty, if those who are to judge of their excellencies had no settled principles by which they are to regulate their decisions, and the merit or defect of performances were to be determined by un-

guided fancy. And indeed we may venture to assert, that whatever speculative knowledge is necessary to the artist, is equally and indispensably necessary to the connoisseur.

The first idea that occurs in the consideration of what is fixed in art, or in taste, is that presiding principle of which I have so frequently spoken in former discourses,—the general idea of nature. The beginning, the middle, and the end of every thing that is valuable in taste, is comprised in the knowledge of what is truly nature; for whatever notions are not conformable to those of nature, or universal opinion, must be considered as more or less capricious.

My notion of nature comprehends not only the forms which nature produces, but also the nature and internal fabric and organization, as I may call it, of the human mind and imagination. The terms beauty, or nature, which are general ideas, are but different modes of expressing the same thing, whether we apply these terms to statues, poetry, or pictures. Deformity is not nature, but an accidental deviation from her accustomed practice. This general idea, therefore, ought to be called nature; and nothing else, correctly speaking, has a right to that name. But we are so far from speaking, in common conversation, with any such accuracy, that, on the contrary, when we criticise Rembrandt and other Dutch painters, who introduced into their historical pictures exact represen-

tations of individual objects, with all their imperfections, we say,—though it is not in a good taste, yet it is nature.

This misapplication of terms must be very often perplexing to the young student. Is not art, he may say, an imitation of nature? Must he not therefore who imitates her with the greatest fidelity, be the best artist? By this mode of reasoning Rembrandt has a higher place than Raffaele. But a very little reflection will serve to show us that these particularities cannot be nature: for how can that be the nature of man, in which no two individuals are the same?

It plainly appears, that as a work is conducted under the influence of general ideas, or partial, it is principally to be considered as the effect of a good or a bad taste.

As beauty therefore does not consist in taking what lies immediately before you, so neither, in our pursuit of taste, are those opinions which we first received and adopted, the best choice, or the most natural to the mind and imagination. In the infancy of our knowledge we seize with greediness the good that is within our reach; it is by after consideration, and in consequence of discipline, that we refuse the present for a greater good at a distance. The nobility or elevation of all arts, like the excellency of virtue itself, consists in adopting this enlarged and comprehensive idea; and all criticism built upon the more confined view

of what is natural, may properly be called *shallow* criticism, rather than false: its defect is, that the truth is not sufficiently extensive.

It has sometimes happened, that some of the greatest men in our art have been betrayed into errors by this confined mode of reasoning. Poussin, who, upon the whole, may be produced as an artist strictly attentive to the most enlarged and extensive ideas of nature, from not having settled principles on this point, has, in one instance at least, I think, deserted truth for prejudice. He is said to have vindicated the conduct of Julio Romano for his inattention to the masses of light and shade, or grouping the figures in the battle of Constantine, as if designedly neglected, the better to correspond with the hurry and confusion of a battle. Poussin's own conduct in many of his pictures, makes us more easily give credit to this report. That it was too much his own practice, the Sacrifice to Silemus, and the Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, may be produced as instances; but this principle is still more apparent, and may be said to be even more ostentatiously displayed in his Perseus and Medusa's Head. †

This is undoubtedly a subject of great bustle and tumult, and that the first effect of the picture may correspond to the subject, every principle of com-

* In the Cabinet of the Earl of Ashburnham.

† In the Cabinet of Sir Peter Burrell.

position is violated; there is no principal figure, no principal light, no groups; every thing is dispersed, and in such a state of confusion, that the eye finds no repose any where. In consequence of the forbidding appearance, I remember turning from it with disgust, and should not have looked a second time, if I had not been called back to a closer inspection. I then indeed found, what we may expect always to find in the works of Poussin, correct drawing, forcible expression, and just character, in short all the excellencies which so much distinguish the works of this learned painter.

This conduct of Poussin I hold to be entirely improper to imitate. A picture should please at first sight, and appear to invite the spectator's attention: if, on the contrary, the general effect offends the eye, a second view is not always sought, whatever more substantial and intrinsic merit it may possess.

Perhaps no apology ought to be received for offences committed against the vehicle (whether it be the organ of seeing, or of hearing,) by which our pleasures are conveyed to the mind. We must take care that the eye be not perplexed and distracted by a confusion of equal parts, or equal lights, or offended by an unharmonious mixture of colours, as we should guard against offending the ear by unharmonious sounds. We may venture to be more confident of the truth of this observation, since we find that Shakspeare, on a parallel occa-

sion, has made Hamlet recommend to the players a precept of the same kind,—never to offend the ear by harsh sounds: “*In the very torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of your passion,*” says he, “*you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.*” And yet, at the same time, he very justly observes, “*The end of playing, both at the first, and now, was and is, to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature.*” No one can deny, that violent passions will naturally emit harsh and disagreeable tones: yet this great poet and critic thought that this imitation of nature would cost too much, if purchased at the expense of disagreeable sensations, or, as he expresses it, of “*splitting the ear.*” The poet and actor, as well as the painter of genius, who is well acquainted with all the variety and sources of pleasure in the mind and imagination, has little regard or attention to common nature, or creeping after common sense. By overleaping those narrow bounds, he more effectually seizes the whole mind, and more powerfully accomplishes his purpose. This success is ignorantly imagined to proceed from inattention to all rules, and a defiance of reason and judgment: whereas it is in truth acting according to the best rules and the justest reason.

He who thinks nature, in the narrow sense of the word, is alone to be followed, will produce but a scanty entertainment for the imagination: every thing is to be done with which it is natural

for the mind to be pleased, whether it proceeds from simplicity or variety, uniformity or irregularity; whether the scenes are familiar or exotic; rude and wild, or enriched and cultivated; for it is natural for the mind to be pleased with all these in their turn. In short, whatever pleases has in it what is analogous to the mind, and is, therefore, in the highest and best sense of the word, natural.

It is the sense of nature or truth, which ought more particularly to be cultivated by the professors of art: and it may be observed, that many wise and learned men, who have accustomed their minds to admit nothing for truth but what can be proved by mathematical demonstration, have seldom any relish for those arts which address themselves to the fancy, the rectitude and truth of which is known by another kind of proof: and we may add, that the acquisition of this knowledge requires as much circumspection and sagacity, as is necessary to attain those truths which are more capable of demonstration. Reason must ultimately determine our choice on every occasion; but this reason may still be exerted ineffectually by applying to taste principles, which though right as far as they go, yet do not reach the object. No man, for instance, can deny, that it seems at first view very reasonable, that a statue which is to carry down to posterity the resemblance of an individual, should be dressed in the fashion of the times, in the dress which he himself wore; this

would certainly be true, if the dress were part of the man : but after a time, the dress is only an amusement for an antiquarian ; and if it obstructs the general design of the piece, it is to be disregarded by the artist. Common sense must here give way to a higher sense. In the naked form, and in the disposition of the drapery, the difference between one artist and another is principally seen. But if he is compelled to exhibit the modern dress, the naked form is entirely hid, and the drapery is already disposed by the skill of the tailor. Were a Phidias to obey such absurd commands, he would please no more than an ordinary sculptor ; since, in the inferior parts of every art, the learned and the ignorant are nearly upon a level.

These were probably among the reasons that induced the sculptor of that wonderful figure of Laocœon to exhibit him naked, notwithstanding he was surprised in the act of sacrificing to Apollo, and consequently ought to have been shown in his sacerdotal habits, if those greater reasons had not preponderated. Art is not yet in so high estimation with us, as to obtain so great a sacrifice as the ancients made, especially the Grecians ; who suffered themselves to be represented naked, whether they were generals, law-givers, or kings.

Under this head of balancing and choosing the greater reason, or of two evils taking the least, we may consider the conduct of Rubens in the Luxembourg gallery, where he has mixed allegorical

figures with the representations of real personages, which must be acknowledged to be a fault; yet, if the artist considered himself as engaged to furnish this gallery with a rich, various, and splendid ornament, this could not be done, at least in an equal degree, without peopling the air and water with these allegorical figures : he therefore accomplished all that he purposed. In this case all lesser considerations, which tend to obstruct the great end of the work, must yield and give way.

The variety which portraits and modern dresses, mixed with allegorical figures, produce, is not to be slightly given up upon a punctilio of reason, when that reason deprives the art in a manner of its very existence. It must always be remembered that the business of a great painter is to produce a great picture; he must therefore take special care not to be cajoled by specious arguments out of his materials.

What has been so often said to the disadvantage of allegorical poetry,—that it is tedious and uninteresting,—cannot with the same propriety be applied to painting, where the interest is of a different kind. If allegorical painting produces a greater variety of ideal beauty, a richer, a more various and delightful composition, and gives to the artist a greater opportunity of exhibiting his skill, all the interest he wishes for is accomplished : such a picture not only attracts, but fixes the attention,

If it be objected that Rubens judged ill at first in thinking it necessary to make his work so very ornamental, this puts the question upon new ground. It was his peculiar style; he could paint in no other; and he was selected for that work, probably because it was his style. Nobody will dispute but some of the best of the Roman or Bolognian schools would have produced a more learned and more noble work.

This leads us to another important province of taste, that of weighing the value of the different classes of the art, and of estimating them accordingly.

All arts have means within them of applying themselves with success both to the intellectual and sensitive part of our natures. It cannot be disputed, supposing both these means put in practice with equal abilities, to which we ought to give the preference; to him who represents the heroic arts and more dignified passions of man, or to him who, by the help of meretricious ornaments, however elegant and graceful, captivates the sensuality, as it may be called, of our taste. Thus the Roman and Bolognian schools are reasonably preferred to the Venetian, Flemish, or Dutch schools, as they address themselves to our best and noblest faculties.

Well-turned periods in eloquence, or harmony of numbers in poetry, which are in those arts what colouring is in painting, however highly we may

esteem them; can never be considered as of equal importance with the art of unfolding truths that are useful to mankind, and which make us better or wiser. Nor can those works which remind us of the poverty and meanness of our nature, be considered as of equal rank with what excites ideas of grandeur, or raises and dignifies humanity; or, in the words of a late poet, which makes the beholder "*learn to venerate himself as man.*"*

It is reason and good sense, therefore, which ranks and estimates every art, and every part of that art, according to its importance, from the painter of animated, down to inanimated nature. We will not allow a man, who shall prefer the inferior style, to say it is his taste; taste here has nothing, or at least ought to have nothing, to do with the question. He wants not taste, but sense and soundness of judgment.

Indeed perfection in an inferior style may be reasonably preferred to mediocrity in the highest walks of art. A landscape of Claude Lorrain may be preferred to a history by Luca Giordano; but hence appears the necessity of the connoisseur's knowing in what consists the excellency of each class, in order to judge how near it approaches to perfection.

Even in works of the same kind, as in history painting, which is composed of various parts, excellence of an inferior species, carried to a very

* Dr. Goldsmith.

high degree, will make a work very valuable, and in some measure compensate for the absence of the higher kinds of merit. It is the duty of the connoisseur to know and esteem, as much as it may deserve, every part of painting: he will not then think even Bassano unworthy of his notice; who, though totally devoid of expression, sense, grace, or elegance, may be esteemed on account of his admirable taste of colours, which, in his best works, are little inferior to those of Titian.

Since I have mentioned Bassano, we must do him likewise the justice to acknowledge, that though he did not aspire to the dignity of expressing the characters and passions of men, yet, with respect to facility and truth in his manner of touching animals of all kinds, and giving them what painters call *their character*, few have excelled him.

To Bassano we may add Paul Veronese and Tintoret, for their entire inattention to what is justly thought the most essential part of our art, the expression of the passions. Notwithstanding these glaring deficiencies, we justly esteem their works; but it must be remembered, that they do not please from those defects, but from their great excellencies of another kind, and in spite of such transgressions. These excellencies, too, as far as they go, are founded in the truth of *general* nature: they tell the *truth*, though not *the whole truth*.

By these considerations, which can never be too frequently impressed, may be obviated two errors,

which I observed to have been, formerly at least, the most prevalent, and to be the most injurious to artists; that of thinking taste and genius to have nothing to do with reason, and that of taking particular living objects for nature.

I shall now say something on that part of *taste*, which, as I have hinted to you before, does not belong so much to the external form of things, but is addressed to the mind, and depends on its original frame, or, to use the expression, the organization of the soul; I mean the imagination and the passions. The principles of these are as invariable as the former, and are to be known and reasoned upon in the same manner, by an appeal to common sense, deciding upon the common feelings of mankind. This sense, and these feelings, appear to me of equal authority, and equally conclusive. Now this appeal implies a general uniformity and agreement in the minds of men. It would be else an idle and vain endeavour to establish rules of art; it would be pursuing a phantom, to attempt to move affections with which we were entirely unacquainted. We have no reason to suspect there is a greater difference between our minds than between our forms; of which, though there are no two alike, yet there is a general similitude that goes through the whole race of mankind; and those who have cultivated their taste, can distinguish what is beautiful or deformed, or, in other words, what agrees with or

deviates from the general idea of nature, in one case, as well as in the other.

The internal fabric of our minds, as well as the external form of our bodies, being nearly uniform : it seems then to follow of course, that as the imagination is incapable of producing any thing originally of itself, and can only vary and combine those ideas with which it is furnished by means of the senses, there will be necessarily an agreement in the imaginations, as in the senses of men. There being this agreement, it follows, that in all cases, in our lightest amusements, as well as in our most serious actions and engagements of life, we must regulate our affections of every kind by that of others. The well-disciplined mind acknowledges this authority, and submits its own opinion to the public voice. It is from knowing what are the general feelings and passions of mankind, that we acquire a true idea of what imagination is ; though it appears as if we had nothing to do but to consult our own particular sensations, and these were sufficient to insure us from all error and mistake.

A knowledge of the disposition and character of the human mind can be acquired only by experience ; a great deal will be learned, I admit, by a habit of examining what passes in our bosoms, what are our own motives of action, and of what kind of sentiments we are conscious on any occasion. We may suppose an uniformity, and conclude that the same effect will be produced by the

same cause in the minds of others. This examination will contribute to suggest to us matters of inquiry ; but we can never be sure that our own sentiments are true and right, till they are confirmed by more extensive observation. One man opposing another determines nothing ; but a general union of minds, like a general combination of the forces of all mankind, makes a strength that is irresistible. In fact, as he who does not know himself does not know others, so it may be said with equal truth, that he who does not know others, knows himself but very imperfectly.

A man who thinks he is guarding himself against prejudices by resisting the authority of others, leaves open every avenue to singularity, vanity, self-conceit, obstinacy, and many other vices, all tending to warp the judgment, and prevent the natural operation of his faculties. This submission to others is a deference which we owe, and indeed are forced involuntarily to pay. In fact, we never are satisfied with our opinions, whatever we may pretend, till they are ratified and confirmed by the suffrages of the rest of mankind. We dispute and wrangle for ever ; we endeavour to get men to come to us, when we do not go to them.

He therefore who is acquainted with the works which have pleased different ages and different countries, and has formed his opinion on them, has more materials, and more means of knowing what is analogous to the mind of man, than he who is

conversant only with the works of his own age or country. What has pleased, and continues to please, is likely to please again : hence are derived the rules of art, and on this immoveable foundation they must ever stand.

This search and study of the history of the mind ought not to be confined to one art only. It is by the analogy that one art bears to another, that many things are ascertained, which either were but faintly seen, or, perhaps, would not have been discovered at all, if the inventor had not received the first hints from the practices of a sister art on a similar occasion.* The frequent allusions which every man who treats of any art is obliged to make to others, in order to illustrate and confirm his principles, sufficiently show their near connection and inseparable relation.

All arts having the same general end, which is to please ; and addressing themselves to the same faculties through the medium of the senses ; it follows that their rules and principles must have as great affinity, as the different materials and the different organs or vehicles by which they pass to the mind, will permit them to retrain.†

We may therefore conclude, that the real sub-

* *Nulla ars, non alterius artis, aut mater, aut propinqua est,*

TERTULL. as cited by JUNIUS.

† *Omnes artes quæ ad humanitatem pertinent, habent quoddam commune, vinculum et quasi cognatione inter se continentur.* CICERO.

stance, as it may be called, of what goes under the name of taste, is fixed and established in the nature of things; that there are certain and regular causes by which the imagination and passions of men are affected; and that the knowledge of these causes is acquired by a laborious and diligent investigation of nature, and by the same slow progress as wisdom or knowledge of every kind, however instantaneous its operations may appear when thus acquired.

It has been often observed, that the good and virtuous man alone can acquire this true or just relish even of works of art. This opinion will not appear entirely without foundation, when we consider that the same habit of mind, which is acquired by our search after truth in the more serious duties of life, is only transferred to the pursuit of lighter amusements. The same disposition, the same desire to find something steady, substantial, and durable, on which the mind can lean as it were, and rest with safety, actuates us in both cases. The subject only is changed. We pursue the same method in our search after the idea of beauty and perfection in each; of virtue, by looking forward beyond ourselves to society, and to the whole; of arts by extending our views in the same manner to all ages and all times.

Every art, like our own, has in its composition fluctuating as well as fixed principles. It is an attentive inquiry into their difference that will

enable us to determine how far we are influenced by custom and habit, and what is fixed in the nature of things.

To distinguish how much has solid foundation, we may have recourse to the same proof by which some hold that wit ought to be tried; whether it preserves itself when translated. That wit is false which can subsist only in one language; and that picture which pleases only one age or one nation, owes its reception to some local or accidental association of ideas.

We may apply this to every custom and habit of life. Thus the general principles of urbanity, politeness, or civility, have been the same in all nations; but the mode in which they are dressed, is continually varying. The general idea of showing respect is by making yourself less; but the manner, whether by bowing the body, kneeling, prostration, pulling off the upper part of our dress, or taking away the lower*, is a matter of custom.

Thus, in regard to ornaments, — it would be unjust to conclude that because they were at first arbitrarily contrived, they are therefore undeserving of our attention; on the contrary, he who neglects the cultivation of those ornaments, acts contrary to nature and reason. As life would be imperfect without its highest ornaments, the arts, so these

* Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. *Exodus*, iii. 5.

arts themselves would be imperfect without *their* ornaments. Though we by no means ought to rank these with positive and substantial beauties, yet it must be allowed, that a knowledge of both is essentially requisite towards forming a complete, whole, and perfect taste. It is in reality from the ornaments, that arts receive their peculiar character and complexion; we may add, that in them we find the characteristical mark of a national taste; as by throwing up a feather in the air, we know which way the wind blows, better than by a more heavy matter.

The striking distinction between the works of the Roman, Bolognian, and Venetian schools, consists more in that general effect which is produced by colours, than in the more profound excellencies of the art, at least it is from thence that each is distinguished and known at first sight. Thus it is the ornaments, rather than the proportions of architecture, which at the first glance distinguish the different orders from each other; the Doric is known by its triglyphs, the Ionic by its volutes, and the Corinthian by its acanthus.

What distinguishes oratory from a cold narration, is a more liberal, though chaste, use of those ornaments which go under the name of figurative and metaphorical expressions; and poetry distinguishes itself from oratory, by words and expressions still more ardent and glowing. What separates and distinguishes poetry, is more particularly

the ornament of *verses*; it is this which gives it its character, and is an essential without which it cannot exist. Custom has appropriated different metre to different kinds of composition, in which the world is not perfectly agreed. In England the dispute is not yet settled, which is to be preferred, rhyme or blank verse. But however we disagree about what these metrical ornaments shall be, that some metre is essentially necessary, is universally acknowledged.

In poetry or eloquence, to determine how far figurative, or metaphorical language may proceed, and when it begins to be affectation or beside the truth, must be determined by taste; though this taste, we must never forget, is regulated and formed by the presiding feelings of mankind,—by those works which have approved themselves to all times and all persons. Thus, though eloquence has undoubtedly an essential and intrinsic excellence, and immoveable principles common in all languages, founded in the nature of our passions and affections; yet it has its ornaments and modes of address, which are merely arbitrary. What is approved in the eastern nations as grand and majestic, would be considered by the Greeks and Romans as turgid and inflated; and they, in return, would be thought by the Orientals to express themselves in a cold and insipid manner.

We may add likewise to the credit of ornaments, that it is by their means that art itself accomplishes

its purpose. Fresnoy calls colouring, which is one of the chief ornaments of painting, *lena sororis*, that which procures lovers and admirers to the more valuable excellencies of the art.

It appears to be the same right turn of mind which enables a man to acquire the *truth*, or the just idea of what is right, in the ornaments, as in the more stable principles of art. It has still the same centre of perfection, though it is the centre of a smaller circle.

To illustrate this by the fashion of dress, in which there is allowed to be a good or bad taste. The component parts of dress are continually changing from great to little, from short to long; but the general form still remains; it is still the same general dress, which is comparatively fixed, though on a very slender foundation; but it is on this which fashion must rest. He who invents with the most success, or dresses in the best taste, would probably, from the same sagacity employed to greater purposes, have discovered equal skill, or have formed the same correct taste, in the highest labours of art.

I have mentioned taste in dress, which is certainly one of the lowest subjects to which this word is applied; yet, as I have before observed, there is a right even here, however narrow its foundation, respecting the fashion of any particular nation. But we have still more slender means of determining to which of the different customs of dif-

ferent ages or countries we ought to give the preference, since they seem to be all equally removed from nature. If an European, when he has cut off his beard, and put false hair on his head, or bound up his own natural hair in regular hard knots, as unlike nature as he can possibly make it; and after having rendered them immoveable by the help of the fat of hogs, has covered the whole with flour, laid on by a machine with the utmost regularity; if, when thus attired, he issues forth, and meets a Cherokee Indian, who has bestowed as much time at his toilet, and laid on with equal care and attention his yellow and red ochre on particular parts of his forehead or cheeks, as he judges most becoming; whoever of these two despises the other for this attention to the fashion of his country, which ever first feels himself provoked to laugh, is the barbarian.

All these fashions are very innocent; neither worth disquisition, nor any endeavour to alter them; as the change would, in all probability, be equally distant from nature. The only circumstance against which indignation may reasonably be moved, is, where the operation is painful or destructive of health; such as some of the practices at Otaheite, and the strait lacing of the English ladies; of the last of which practices, how destructive it must be to health and long life, the professor of anatomy took an opportunity of proving a few days since in this academy.

It is in dress as in things of greater consequence. Fashions originate from those only who have the high and powerful advantages of rank, birth, and fortune. Many of the ornaments of art, those at least for which no reason can be given, are transmitted to us, are adopted, and acquire their consequence from the company in which we have been used to see them. As Greece and Rome are the fountains from whence have flowed all kinds of excellence, to that veneration which they have a right to claim for the pleasure and knowledge which they have afforded us, we voluntarily add our approbation of every ornament and every custom that belonged to them, even to the fashion of their dress. For it may be observed that, not satisfied with them in their own place, we make no difficulty of dressing statues of modern heroes or senators in the fashion of the Roman armour or peaceful robe; we go so far as hardly to bear a statue in any other drapery.

The figures of the great men of those nations have come down to us in sculpture. In sculpture remain almost all the excellent specimens of ancient art. We have so far associated personal dignity to the persons thus represented, and the truth of art to their manner of representation, that it is not in our power any longer to separate them. This is not so in painting, because having no excellent ancient portraits, that connection was never formed. Indeed we could no more venture to paint a general officer in a Roman military habit, than we

could make a statue in the present uniform. But since we have no ancient portraits (to show how ready we are to adopt those kind of prejudices) we make the best authority among the moderns serve the same purpose. The great variety of excellent portraits with which Vandyck has enriched this nation, we are not content to admire for their real excellence, but extend our approbation even to the dress which happened to be the fashion of that age. We all very well remember how common it was a few years ago for portraits to be drawn in this fantastic dress; and this custom is not yet entirely laid aside. By this means it must be acknowledged very ordinary pictures acquired something of the air and effect of the works of Vandyck, and appeared therefore at first sight to be better pictures than they really were; they appeared so, however, to those only who had the means of making this association; and when made, it was irresistible. But this association is nature, and refers to that secondary truth that comes from conformity to general prejudice and opinion; it is therefore not merely fantastical. Besides the prejudice which we have in favour of ancient dresses, there may be likewise other reasons for the effect which they produce; among which we may justly rank the simplicity of them, consisting of little more than one single piece of drapery, without those whimsical capricious forms by which all other dresses are embarrassed.

Thus, though it is from the prejudice we have in

favour of the ancients, who have taught us architecture, that we have adopted likewise their ornaments; and though we are satisfied that neither nature nor reason are the foundation of those beauties which we imagine we see in that art, yet if any one, persuaded of this truth, should therefore invent new orders of equal beauty, which we will suppose to be possible, they would not please; nor ought he to complain, since the old has that great advantage of having custom and prejudice on its side. In this case we leave what has every prejudice in its favour, to take that which will have no advantage over what we have left, but novelty; which soon destroys itself, and at any rate is but a weak antagonist against custom.

Ancient ornaments, having the right of possession, ought not to be removed, unless to make room for that which not only has higher pretensions, but such pretensions as will balance the evil and confusion which innovation always brings with it.

To this we may add, that even the durability, of the materials will often contribute to give a superiority to one object over another. Ornaments in buildings, with which taste is principally concerned, are composed of materials which last longer than those of which dress is composed; the former therefore make higher pretensions to our favour and prejudice.

Some attention is surely due to what we can no more get rid of, than we can go out of ourselves.

We are creatures of prejudice; we neither can nor ought to eradicate it; we must only regulate it by reason; which kind of regulation is indeed little more than obliging the lesser, the local and temporary prejudices, to give way to those which are more durable and lasting.

He therefore, who in his practice of portrait painting, wishes to dignify his subject, which we will suppose to be a lady, will not paint her in the modern dress, the familiarity of which alone is sufficient to destroy all dignity. He takes care that his work shall correspond to those ideas and that imagination which he knows will regulate the judgment of others; and therefore dresses his figure something with the general air of the antique for the sake of dignity, and preserves something of the modern for the sake of likeness. By this conduct his works correspond with those prejudices which we have in favour of what we continually see; and the relish of the antique simplicity corresponds with what we may call the more learned and scientific prejudices.

There was a statue made not long since of Voltaire, which the sculptor, not having that respect for the prejudices of mankind that he ought to have had, made entirely naked, and as meagre and emaciated as the original is said to be. The consequence was what might have been expected: it remained in the sculptor's shop, though it was intended as a public ornament and a public honour

to Voltaire, for it was procured at the expence of his cotemporary wits and admirers.

Whoever would reform a nation, supposing a bad taste to prevail in it, will not accomplish his purpose by going directly against the stream of their prejudices. Men's minds must be prepared to receive what is new to them. Reformation is a work of time. A national taste, however wrong it may be, cannot be totally changed at once; we must yield a little to the prepossession which has taken hold on the mind, and we may then bring people to adopt what would offend them, if endeavoured to be introduced by violence. When Battista Franco was employed, in conjunction with Titian, Paul Veronese, and Tintoret, to adorn the library of St. Mark, his work, Vasari says, gave less satisfaction than any of the others: the dry manner of the Roman school was very ill calculated to please eyes that had been accustomed to the luxuriancy, splendour, and richness of Venetian colouring. Had the Romans been the judges of this work, probably the determination would have been just contrary; for in the more noble parts of the art Battista Franco was perhaps not inferior to any of his rivals.

GENTLEMEN,

It has been the main scope and principal end of this Discourse to demonstrate the reality of a standard in taste, as well as in corporeal

beauty; that a false or depraved taste is a thing as well known, as easily discovered as any thing that is deformed, mis-shapen, or wrong, in our form or outward make; and that this knowledge is derived from the uniformity of sentiments among mankind, from whence proceeds the knowledge of what are the general habits of nature; the result of which is an idea of perfect beauty.

If what has been advanced be true,—that beside this beauty or truth, which is formed on the uniform, eternal, and immutable laws of nature, and which of necessity can be but *one*; that beside this one immutable verity there are likewise what we have called apparent or secondary truths, proceeding from local and temporary prejudices, fancies, fashions or accidental connection of ideas; if it appears that these last have still their foundation, however slender, in the original fabrick of our minds, it follows that all these truths or beauties deserve and require the attention of the artist, in proportion to their stability or duration, or as their influence is more or less extensive. And let me add, that as they ought not to pass their just bounds, so neither do they, in a well regulated taste, at all prevent or weaken the influence of those general principles, which alone can give to art its true and permanent dignity.

To form this just taste is undoubtedly in your own power, but it is to reason and philosophy that you must have recourse; from them you must

borrow the balance, by which is to be weighed and estimated the value of every pretension that intrudes itself on your notice.

The general objection which is made to the introduction of philosophy into the regions of taste, is, that it checks and restrains the flight of the imagination, and gives that timidity, which an over-carefulness not to err or act contrary to reason is likely to produce. It is not so. Fear is neither reason nor philosophy. The true spirit of philosophy, by giving knowledge, gives a manly confidence, and substitutes rational firmness in the place of vain presumption. A man of real taste is always a man of judgment in other respects; and those inventions which either disdain or shrink from reason, are generally, I fear, more like the dreams of a distempered brain, than the exalted enthusiasm of a sound and true genius. In the midst of the highest flights of fancy or imagination, reason ought to preside from first to last, though I admit her more powerful operation is upon reflection.

Let me add, that some of the greatest names of antiquity, and those who have most distinguished themselves in works of genius and imagination, were equally eminent for their critical skill. Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Horace; and among the moderns, Boileau, Corneille, Pope, and Dryden, are at least instances of genius not being destroyed by attention or subjection to rules and science. I should hope therefore, that the natural consequence

of what has been said, would be, to excite in you a desire of knowing the principles and conduct of the great masters of our art, and respect and veneration for them when known.

DISCOURSE VIII.

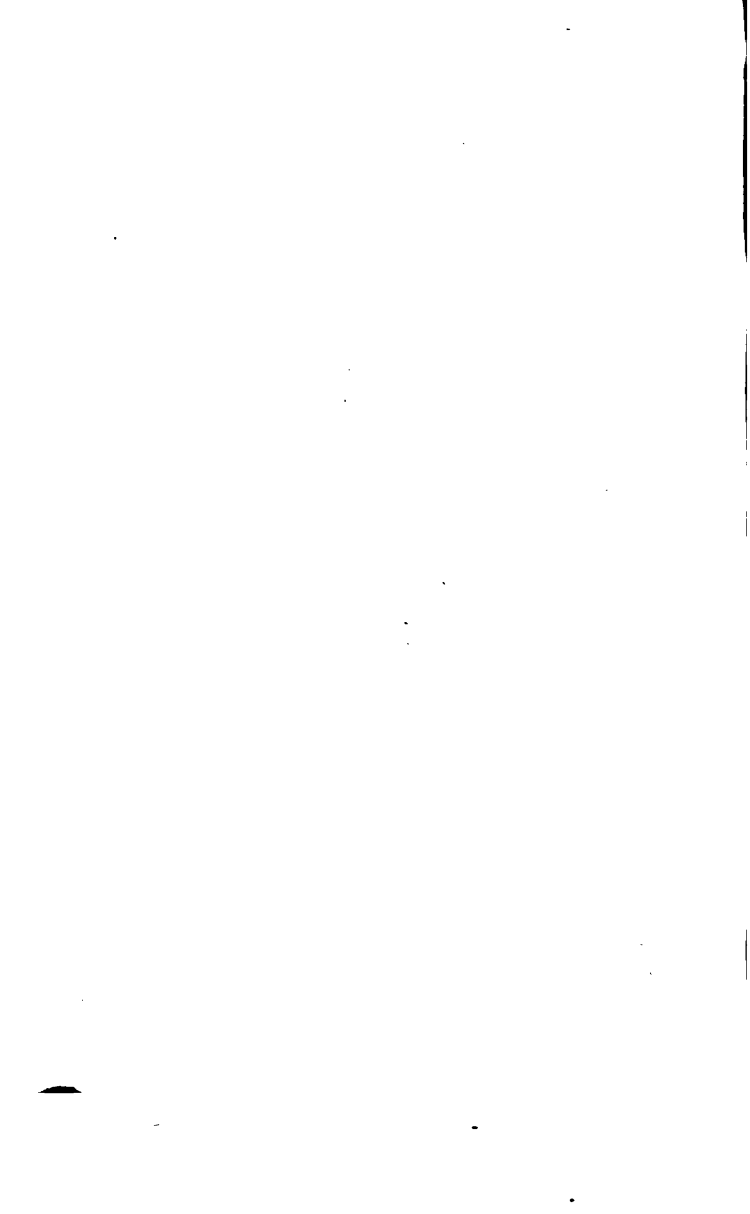
DELIVERED TO THE STUDENTS OF

THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

ON THE

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRIZES,

DECEMBER 10, 1778.



DISCOURSE VIII.

The principles of art, whether Poetry or Painting, have their foundation in the mind ; such as novelty, variety, and contrast ; these in their excess become defects.—Simplicity ; its excess disagreeable.—Rules not to be always observed in their literal sense : sufficient to preserve the spirit of the law.—Observations on the Prize Pictures.

GENTLEMEN,

I HAVE recommended in former * Discourses, that artists should learn their profession by endeavouring to form an idea of perfection from the different excellencies which lie dispersed in the various schools of painting. Some difficulty will still occur, to know what is beauty, and where it may be found : one would wish not to be obliged to take it entirely on the credit of fame ; though to this, I acknowledge, the younger students must unavoidably submit. Any suspicion in them of the chance of their being deceived, will have more tendency to obstruct their advancement, than even

* Discourse II. and VI.

an enthusiastic confidence in the perfection of their models. But to the more advanced in the art, who wish to stand on more stable and firmer ground, and to establish principles on a stronger foundation than authority, however venerable or powerful, it may be safely told that there is still a higher tribunal, to which those great masters themselves must submit, and to which indeed every excellence in art must be ultimately referred. He who is ambitious to enlarge the boundaries of his art, must extend his views beyond the precepts which are found in books, or may be drawn from the practice of his predecessors, to a knowledge of those precepts in the mind, those operations of intellectual nature, to which every thing that aspires to please, must be proportioned and accommodated.

Poetry having a more extensive power than our art, exerts its influence over almost all the passions; among those may be reckoned one of our most prevalent dispositions, anxiety for the future. Poetry operates by raising our curiosity, engaging the mind by degrees to take an interest in the event, keeping that event suspended, and surprising at last with an unexpected catastrophe.

The painter's art is more confined, and has nothing that corresponds with, or perhaps is equivalent to, this power and advantage of leading the mind on, till attention is totally engaged. What is done by painting, must be done at one blow;

curiosity has received at once all the satisfaction it can ever have. There are, however, other intellectual qualities and dispositions which the painter can satisfy and effect as powerfully as the poet: among those we may reckon our love of novelty, variety, and contrast; these qualities, on examination, will be found to refer to a certain activity and restlessness which has a pleasure and delight in being exercised and put in motion: art therefore only administers to those wants and desires of the mind.

It requires no long disquisition to show, that the dispositions which I have stated actually subsist in the human mind. Variety re-animates the attention, which is apt to languish under a continual sameness. Novelty makes a more forcible impression on the mind, than can be made by the representation of what we have often seen before; and contrasts rouse the power of comparison by opposition. All this is obvious; but, on the other hand, it must be remembered, that the mind, though an active principle, has likewise a disposition to indolence; and though it loves exercise, loves it only to a certain degree, beyond which it is very unwilling to be led, or driven; the pursuit therefore of novelty and variety may be carried to excess. When variety entirely destroys the pleasure proceeding from uniformity and repetition, and when novelty counteracts and shuts out the pleasure arising from old habits and customs, they

oppose too much the indolence of our disposition : the mind therefore can bear with pleasure but a small portion of novelty at a time. The main part of the work must be in the mode to which we have been used. An affection to old habits and customs I take to be the predominant disposition of the mind, and novelty comes as an exception : where all is novelty, the attention, the exercise of the mind is too violent. Contrast, in the same manner, when it exceeds certain limits, is as disagreeable as a violent and perpetual opposition ; it gives to the senses, in their progress, a more sudden change than they can bear with pleasure.

It is then apparent, that those qualities, however they contribute to the perfection of art, when kept within certain bounds, if they are carried to excess, become defects, and require correction : a work consequently will not proceed better and better as it is more varied ; variety can never be the ground-work and principle of the performance ; it must be only employed to recreate and relieve.

To apply these general observations which belong equally to all arts, to ours in particular. In a composition, when the objects are scattered and divided into many equal parts, the eye is perplexed and fatigued, from not knowing where to find the principal action, or which is the principal figure ; for where all are making equal pretensions to notice, all are in equal danger of neglect.

The expression which is used very often, on

these occasions is, the piece wants repose ; a word which perfectly expresses a relief of the mind from that state of hurry and anxiety which it suffers, when looking at a work of this character.

On the other hand, absolute unity, that is, a large work, consisting of one group or mass of light only, would be as defective as an heroic poem without episode, or any collateral incidents to recreate the mind with that variety which it always requires.

An instance occurs to me of two painters, (Rembrandt and Poussin,) of characters totally opposite to each other in every respect, but in nothing more than in their mode of composition, and management of light and shadow. Rembrandt's manner is absolute unity ; he often has but one group, and exhibits little more than one spot of light in the midst of a large quantity of shadow : if he has a second mass, that second bears no proportion to the principal. Poussin, on the contrary, has scarce any principal mass of light at all, and his figures are often too much dispersed, without sufficient attention to place them in groups.

The conduct of these two painters is entirely the reverse of what might be expected from their general style and character ; the works of Poussin being as much distinguished for simplicity, as those of Rembrandt for combination. Even this conduct of Poussin might proceed from too great an affection to simplicity of *another kind* ; too great

a desire to avoid that ostentation of art, with regard to light and shadow, on which Rembrandt so much wished to draw the attention: however, each of them ran into contrary extremes, and it is difficult to determine which is the most reprehensible, both being equally distant from the demands of nature, and the purposes of art.

The same just moderation must be observed in regard to ornaments; nothing will contribute more to destroy repose than profusion, of whatever kind, whether it consists in the multiplicity of objects, or the variety and brightness of colours. On the other hand, a work without ornament, instead of simplicity, to which it makes pretensions, has rather the appearance of poverty. The degree to which ornaments are admissible, must be regulated by the professed style of the work; but we may be sure of this truth,—that the most ornamental style requires repose to set off even its ornaments to advantage. I cannot avoid mentioning here an instance of repose, in that faithful and accurate painter of nature, Shakspeare;—the short dialogue between Duncan and Banquo, whilst they are approaching the gates of Macbeth's castle. Their conversation very naturally turns upon the beauty of its situation, and the pleasantness of the air: and Banquo observing the martlets' nests in every recess of the cornice, remarks, that where those birds most breed and haunt, the air is delicate. The subject of this quiet and easy conversation

gives that repose so necessary to the mind, after the tumultuous bustle of the preceding scenes, and perfectly contrasts the scene of horror that immediately succeeds. It seems as if Shakspeare asked himself:—What is a prince likely to say to his attendants on such an occasion? The modern writers seem, on the contrary, to be always searching for new thoughts, such as never could occur to men in the situation represented. This is also frequently the practice of Homer; who, from the midst of battles and horrors, relieves and refreshes the mind of the reader, by introducing some quiet rural image, or picture of familiar domestic life. The writers of every age and country, where taste has begun to decline, paint and adorn every object they touch; are always on the stretch; never deviate or sink a moment from the pompous and the brilliant. Lucan, Statius, and Claudian, (as a learned critic has observed,) are examples of this bad taste and want of judgment; they never soften their tones, or condescend to be natural; all is exaggeration and perpetual splendour, without affording repose of any kind.

As we are speaking of excesses, it will not be remote from our purpose to say a few words upon simplicity; which, in one of the senses in which it is used, is considered as the general corrector of excess. We shall at present forbear to consider it as implying that exact conduct which proceeds from an intimate knowledge of simple

unadulterated nature, as it is then only another word for perfection, which neither stops short of, nor oversteps, reality and truth.

In our inquiry after simplicity, as in many other inquiries of this nature, we can best explain what is right, by showing what is wrong ; and, indeed, in this case it seems to be absolutely necessary : simplicity, being only a negative virtue, cannot be described or defined. We must therefore explain its nature, and show the advantage and beauty which is derived from it, by showing the deformity which proceeds from its neglect.

Though instances of this neglect might be expected to be found in practice, we should not expect to find in the works of critics, precepts that bid defiance to simplicity and every thing that relates to it. Du Piles recommends to us portrait painters, to add grace and dignity to the characters of those, whose pictures we draw : so far he is undoubtedly right ; but, unluckily, he descends to particulars, and gives his own idea of grace and dignity, “ *If,*” says he, “ *you draw persons of high character and dignity, they ought to be drawn in such an attitude, that the portraits must seem to speak to us of themselves ; and, as it were, to say to us, ‘ Stop, take notice of me, I am that invincible king, surrounded by majesty :—I am that valiant commander, who struck terror every where :—I am that great minister, who knew all the springs of politics :—I am that magistrate of consummate wisdom and*

probity." He goes on in this manner, with all the characters he can think on. We may contrast the tumour of this presumptuous loftiness with the natural unaffected air of the portraits of Titian, where dignity, seeming to be natural and inherent, draws spontaneous reverence, and instead of being thus vainly assumed, has the appearance of an unalienable adjunct; whereas such pompous and laboured insolence of grandeur is so far from creating respect, that it betrays vulgarity and meanness, and new-acquired consequence.

The painters, many of them at least, have not been backward in adopting the notions contained in these precepts. The portraits of Rigaud are perfect examples of an implicit observance of these rules of Du Piles; so that though he was a painter of great merit in many respects, yet that merit is entirely overpowered by a total absence of simplicity in every sense.

Not to multiply instances, which might be produced for this purpose, from the works of history painters, I shall mention only one,—a picture which I have seen of the Supreme, Being by Coypell.

This subject the Roman Catholic painters have taken the liberty to represent, however indecent the attempt, and however obvious the impossibility of any approach to an adequate representation; but here the air and character, which the painter has given, and he has doubtless given the

highest he could conceive, are so degraded by an attempt at such dignity as De Piles has recommended, that we are enraged at the folly and presumption of the artist, and consider it as little less than profanation.

As we have passed to a neighbouring nation for instances of want of this quality, we must acknowledge, at the same time, that they have produced great examples of simplicity, in Poussin and Le Sueur. But as we are speaking of the most refined and subtle notion of perfection, may we not inquire whether a curious eye cannot discern some faults, even in those great men? I can fancy, that even Poussin, by abhorring that affectation and that want of simplicity, which he observed in his countrymen, has, in certain particulars, fallen into the contrary extreme, so far as to approach to a kind of affectation:—to what, in writing, would be called pedantry.

When simplicity, instead of being a corrector, seems to set up for herself; that is, when an artist seems to value himself solely upon this quality; such an ostentatious display of simplicity becomes then as disagreeable and nauseous as any other kind of affectation. He is, however, in this case, likely enough to sit down contented with his own work, for though he finds the world look at it with indifference or dislike, as being destitute of every quality that can recreate or give pleasure to the mind, yet he consoles himself that it has simplicity,

a beauty of too pure and chaste a nature to be relished by vulgar minds.

It is in art as in morals; no character would inspire us with an enthusiastic admiration of his virtue, if that virtue consisted only in an absence of vice; something more is required: a man must do more than merely his duty, to be a hero.

Those works of the ancients, which are in the highest esteem, have something beside mere simplicity to recommend them. The Apollo, the Venus, the Laocoon, the Gladiator, have a certain composition of action, have contrasts sufficient to give grace and energy in a high degree; but it must be confessed of the many thousand antique statues which we have, that their general characteristic is bordering at least on inanimate insipidity.

Simplicity, when so very inartificial as to seem to evade the difficulties of art, is a very suspicious virtue.

I do not, however, wish to degrade simplicity from the high estimation in which it has been ever justly held. It is our barrier against that great enemy to truth and nature, affectation, which is ever clinging to the pencil, and ready to drop in and poison every thing it touches.

Our love and affection to simplicity proceeds in a great measure from our aversion to every kind of affectation: There is likewise another reason why so much stress is laid upon this virtue; the propensity which artists have to fall into the contrary ex-

treme ; we therefore set a guard on that side which is most assailable. When a young artist is first told that his composition and his attitudes must be contrasted, that he must turn the head contrary to the position of the body, in order to produce grace and animation ; that his outline must be undulating, and swelling, to give grandeur ; and that the eye must be gratified with a variety of colours ; when he is told this, with certain animating words of spirit, dignity, energy, grace, greatness of style, and brilliancy of tints, he becomes suddenly vain of his newly acquired knowledge, and never thinks he can carry those rules too far. It is then that the aid of simplicity ought to be called in to correct the exuberance of youthful ardour.

The same may be said in regard to colouring, which in its pre-eminence is particularly applied to flesh. An artist in his first essay of imitating nature, would make the whole mass of one colour, as the oldest painters did ; till he is taught to observe not only the variety of tints, which are in the object itself, but the differences produced by the gradual decline of light to shadow : he then immediately puts his instruction in practice, and introduces a variety of distinct colours. He must then be again corrected and told, that though there is this variety, yet the effect of the whole upon the eye must have the union and simplicity of the colouring of nature.

And here we may observe, that the progress of an individual student bears a great resemblance to

the progress and advancement of the art itself. Want of simplicity would probably be not one of the defects of an artist who had studied nature only, as it was not of the old masters, who lived in the time preceding the great art of painting; on the contrary, their works are too simple and too inartificial.

The art in its infancy, like the first work of a student, was dry, hard, and simple; but this kind of barbarous simplicity would be better named penury, as it proceeds from mere want; from want of knowledge, want of resources, want of abilities to be otherwise: their simplicity was the offspring, not of choice, but necessity.

In the second stage they were sensible of this poverty; and those who were the most sensible of the want, were the best judges of the measure of the supply. There were painters who emerged from poverty without falling into luxury. Their success induced others, who probably never would of themselves have had the strength of mind to discover the original defect, to endeavour at the remedy by an abuse; and they ran into the contrary extreme. But however they may have strayed, we cannot recommend to them to return to that simplicity which they have justly quitted; but to deal out their abundance with a more sparing hand, with that dignity which makes no parade, either of its riches, or of its art. It is not easy to give a rule which may serve to fix this just and correct medium: because when we may have fixed, or nearly

fixed the middle point, taken as a general principle, circumstances may oblige us to depart from it, either on the side of simplicity, or on that of variety and decoration.

I thought it necessary in a former Discourse, speaking of the difference of the sublime and ornamental style of painting,—in order to excite your attention to the more manly, noble, and dignified manner,—to leave perhaps an impression too contemptuous of those ornamental parts of our art, for which many have valued themselves, and many works are much valued and esteemed.

I said then, what I thought it was right at that time to say ; I supposed the disposition of young men more inclinable to splendid negligence, than perseverance in laborious application to acquire correctness ; and therefore did as we do in making what is crooked straight, by bending it the contrary way, in order that it may remain straight at last.

For this purpose, then, and to correct excess or neglect of any kind, we may here add, that it is not enough that a work be learned ; it must be pleasing : the painter must add grace to strength, if he desires to secure the first impression in his favour. Our taste has a kind of sensuality about it, as well as a love of the sublime ; both these qualities of the mind are to have their proper consequence, as far as they do not counteract each other ; for that is the grand error which much care ought to be taken to avoid.

There are some rules, whose absolute authority,

like that of our nurses, continues no longer than while we are in a state of childhood. One of the first rules, for instance, that I believe every master would give to a young pupil, respecting his conduct and management of light and shadow, would be what Lionardo da Vinci has actually given; that you must oppose a light ground to the shadowed side of your figure, and a dark ground to the light side. If Lionardo had lived to see the superior splendour and effect which has been since produced by the exactly contrary conduct,—by joining light to light and shadow to shadow,—though without doubt he would have admired it, yet as it ought not, so probably it would not, be the first rule with which he would have begun his instructions.

Again;—in the artificial management of the figures, it is directed that they shall contrast each other according to the rules generally given; that if one figure opposes his front to the spectator, the next figure is to have his back turned, and that the limbs of each individual figure be contrasted; that is, if the right leg be put forward, the right arm is to be drawn back.

It is very proper that those rules should be given in the academy; it is proper the young students should be informed that some research is to be made, and that they should be habituated to consider every excellence as reduceable to principles. Besides, it is the natural progress of instruction to

teach first what is obvious and perceptible to the senses, from hence proceed gradually to notions large, liberal, and complete, such as comprise the more refined and higher excellencies in art. But when students are more advanced, they will find that the greatest beauties of character and expression are produced without contrast; nay more, that this contrast would ruin and destroy that natural energy of men engaged in real action, unsolicitous of grace. St. Paul preaching at Athens in one of the Cartoons, far from any affected academical contrast of limbs, stands equally on both legs, and both hands are in the same attitude: add contrast, and the whole energy and unaffected grace of the figure is destroyed. Elymas the Sorcerer stretches both hands forward in the same direction, which gives perfectly the expression intended. Indeed you never will find in the works of Raffaele any of those school-boy affected contrasts. Whatever contrast there is, appears without any seeming agency of art, by the natural chance of things.

What has been said of the evil of excesses of all kinds, whether of simplicity, variety, or contrast, naturally suggests to the painter the necessity of a general inquiry into the true meaning and cause of rules, and how they operate on those faculties to which they are addressed: by knowing their general purpose and meaning, he will often find that he need not confine himself to the literal sense, it will be sufficient if he preserve the spirit of the law.

Critical remarks are not always understood without examples : it may not be improper therefore to give instances where the rule itself, though generally received, is false, or where a narrow conception of it may lead the artists into great errors.

It is given as a rule by Fresnoy, that *the principal figure of a subject must appear in the midst of the picture, under the principal light, to distinguish it from the rest.* A painter who should think himself obliged strictly to follow this rule, would encumber himself with needless difficulties ; he would be confined to great uniformity of composition, and be deprived of many beauties which are incompatible with its observance. The meaning of this rule extends, or ought to extend, no further than this :—that the principal figure should be immediately distinguished at the first glance of the eye ; but there is no necessity that the principal light should fall on the principal figure, or that the principal figure should be in the middle of the picture. It is sufficient that it be distinguished by its place, or by the attention of other figures pointing it out to the spectator. So far is this rule from being indispensable, that it is very seldom practised, other considerations of greater consequence often standing in the way. Examples in opposition to this rule, are found in the Cartoons, in Christ's charge to Peter, the Preaching of St. Paul, and Elymas the Sorcerer, who is undoubtedly the principal object in that picture. In none of those composi-

tions is the principal figure in the midst of the picture. In the very admirable composition of the *Tent of Darius*, by Le Brun, Alexander is not in the middle of the picture, nor does the principal light fall on him ; but the attention of all the other figures immediately distinguishes him, and distinguishes him more properly ; the greatest light falls on the daughter of Darius, who is in the middle of the picture, where it is more necessary the principal light should be placed.

It is very extraordinary that Felibien, who has given a very minute description of this picture, but indeed such a description as may be rather called panegyric than criticism, thinking it necessary (according to the precept of Fresnoy) that Alexander should possess the principal light, has accordingly given it to him ; he might with equal truth have said that he was placed in the middle of the picture, as he seemed resolved to give this piece every kind of excellence which he conceived to be necessary to perfection. His generosity is here unluckily misapplied, as it would have destroyed, in a great measure, the beauty of the composition.

Another instance occurs to me, where equal liberty may be taken in regard to the management of light. Though the general practice is, to make a large mass about the middle of the picture, surrounded by shadow, the reverse may be practised, and the spirit of the rule may still be preserved. Examples of this principle reversed may be found

very frequently in the works of the Venetian school. In the great composition of Paul Veronese, the *Marriage at Cana*, the figures are for the most part in half shadow; the great light is in the sky; and indeed the general effect of this picture, which is so striking, is no more than what we often see in landscapes, in small pictures of fairs and country feasts: but those principles of light and shadow, being transferred to a large scale, to a space containing near a hundred figures as large as life, and conducted to all appearance with as much facility, and with an attention as steadily fixed upon *the whole together*, as if it were a small picture immediately under the eye, the work justly excites our admiration; the difficulty being increased as the extent is enlarged.

The various modes of composition are infinite; sometimes it shall consist of one large group in the middle of the picture, and the smaller groups on each side; or a plain space in the middle, and the groups of figures ranked round this vacuity.

Whether this principal broad light be in the middle space of ground, as in *the School of Athens*; or in the sky, as in *the Marriage at Cana*, in *the Andromeda*, and in most of the pictures of Paul Veronese; or whether the light be on the groups; whatever mode of composition is adopted, every variety and licence is allowable: this only is indisputably necessary, that to prevent the eye from being distracted and

confused by a multiplicity of objects of equal magnitude, those objects, whether they consist of lights, shadows, or figures, must be disposed in large masses and groups properly varied and contrasted ; that to a certain quantity of action a proportioned space of plain ground is required ; that light is to be supported by sufficient shadow ; and we may add, that a certain quantity of cold colours is necessary to give value and lustre to the warm colours : what those proportions are cannot be so well learned by precept as by observation on pictures, and in this knowledge bad pictures will instruct as well as good. Our inquiry why pictures have a bad effect, may be as advantageous as the inquiry why they have a good effect ; each will corroborate the principles that are suggested by the other.

Though it is not my *business* to enter into the detail of our art, yet I must take this opportunity of mentioning one of the means of producing that great effect which we observe in the works of the Venetian painters, as I think it is not generally known or observed. It ought, in my opinion, to be indispensably observed, that the masses of light in a picture be always of a warm mellow colour, yellow, red, or a yellowish-white ; and that the blue, the grey, or the green colours be kept almost entirely out of these masses, and be used only to support and set off these warm colours ; and for this purpose, a small proportion of cold colours will be sufficient.

Let this conduct be reserved; let the light be cold, and the surrounding colours warm, as we often see in the works of the Roman and Florentine painters, and it will be out of the power of art, even in the hands of Rubens or Titian, to make a picture splendid and harmonious.

Le Brun and Carlo Maratti were two painters of great merit, and particularly what may be called academical merit, but were both deficient in this management of colours; the want of observing this rule is one of the causes of that heaviness of effect which is so observable in their works. The principal light in the picture of Le Brun, which I just now mentioned, falls on Statira, who is dressed very injudiciously in a pale blue drapery; it is true he has heightened this blue with gold, but that is not enough, the whole picture has a heavy air, and by no means answers the expectation raised by the print. Poussin often made a spot of blue drapery, when the general hue of the picture was inclinable to brown or yellow; which shows sufficiently, that harmony of colouring was not a part of the art that had much engaged the attention of that great painter.

The conduct of Titian, in the picture of Bacchus and Ariadne, has been much celebrated, and justly, for the harmony of colouring. To Ariadne is given (say the critics) a red scarf, to relieve the figure from the sea, which is behind her. It is not for that reason alone, but for another of much

greater consequence; for the sake of the general harmony and effect of the picture. The figure of Ariadne is separated from the great group, and is dressed in blue, which added to the colour of the sea, makes that quantity of cold colour which Titian thought necessary for the support and brilliancy of the great group; which group is composed, with very little exception, entirely of mellow colours. But as the picture in this case would be divided into two distinct parts, one half cold, and the other warm, it was necessary to carry some of the mellow colours of the great group into the cold part of the picture, and a part of the cold into the great group; accordingly, Titian gave Ariadne a red scarf, and to one of the Bacchantes a little blue drapery.

The light of the picture, as I observed, ought to be of a warm colour; for, though white may be used for the principal light, as was the practice of many of the Dutch and Flemish painters, yet it is better to suppose *that white* illumined by the yellow rays of the setting sun, as was the manner of Titian. The superiority of which manner is never more striking, than when in a collection of pictures we chance to see a portrait of Titian's hanging by the side of a Flemish picture (even though that should be of the hand of Vandyck), which, however admirable in other respects, becomes cold and grey in the comparison.

The illuminated parts of objects are in nature of

a warmer tint than those that are in the shade: what I have recommended, therefore, is no more than that the same conduct be observed in the whole, which is acknowledged to be necessary in every individual part. It is presenting to the eye the same effect as that which it has been *accustomed* to feel, which in this case, as in every other, will always produce beauty; no principle therefore in our art can be more certain, or is derived from a higher source.

What I just now mentioned of the supposed reason why Ariadne has part of her drapery red, gives me occasion here to observe, that this favourite quality of giving objects relief, and which De Piles, and all the critics have considered as a requisite of the utmost importance, was not one of those objects which much engaged the attention of Titian; painters of an inferior rank have far exceeded him in producing this effect. This was a great object of attention when art was in its infant state; as it is at present with the vulgar and ignorant, who feel the highest satisfaction in seeing a figure, which, as they say, looks as if they could walk round it. But however low I may rate this pleasure of deception, I should not oppose it, did it not oppose itself to a quality of a much higher kind, by counteracting entirely that fulness of manner which is so difficult to express in words, but which is found in perfection in the best works of Corregio, and we may add, of Rembrandt. This

effect is produced by melting and losing the shadows in a ground still darker than those shadows ; whereas that relief is produced by opposing and separating the ground from the figure, either by light, or shadow, or colour. This conduct of inlaying, as it may be called, figures on their ground, in order to produce relief, was the practice of the old painters, such as Andrea Mantegna, Pietro Perugino, and Albert Durer ; and to these we may add the first manner of Lionardo da Vinci, Giorgione, and even Corregio ; but these three were among the first who began to correct themselves in dryness of style, by no longer considering relief as a principal object. As those two qualities, relief, and fulness of effect, can hardly exist together, it is not very difficult to determine to which we ought to give the preference. An artist is obliged for ever to hold a balance in his hand, by which he must determine the value of different qualities ; that, when *some* fault must be committed, he may choose the least. Those painters who have best understood the art of producing a good effect, have adopted one principle that seems perfectly conformable to reason ; that a part may be sacrificed for the good of the whole. Thus, whether the masses consist of light or shadow, it is necessary that they should be compact and of a pleasing shape : to this end some parts may be made darker and some lighter, and reflections stronger than nature would warrant. Paolo Veronese took great

liberties of this kind. It is said, that being once asked why certain figures were painted in shade, as no cause was seen in the picture itself, he turned off the inquiry by answering, "*una nuvola che passa*," a cloud is passing, which has overshadowed them.

But I cannot give a better instance of this practice than a picture which I have of Rubens'; it is a representation of a Moonlight. Rubens has not only diffused more light over the picture than is in nature, but has bestowed on it those warm glowing colours by which his works are so much distinguished. It is so unlike what any other painters have given us of moonlight, that it might be easily mistaken, if he had not likewise added stars, for a fainter setting sun. Rubens thought the eye ought to be satisfied in this case, above all other considerations: he might, indeed, have made it more natural, but it would have been at the expense of what he thought of much greater consequence,—the harmony proceeding from the contrast and variety of colours.

This same picture will furnish us with another instance, where we must depart from nature for a greater advantage. The Moon in this picture does not preserve so great a superiority in regard to its lightness over the object which it illumines, as it does in nature; this is likewise an intended deviation, and for the same reason. If Rubens had preserved the same scale of gradation of light

between the Moon and the objects, which is found in nature, the picture must have consisted of one small spot of light only, and at a little distance from the picture nothing but this spot would have been seen. It may be said, indeed, that this being the case, it is a subject that ought not to be painted : but then, for the same reason, neither armour, nor any thing shining ought ever to be painted ; for though pure white is used in order to represent the greatest light of shining objects, it will not in the picture preserve the same superiority over flesh, as it has in nature, without keeping that flesh-colour of a very low tint. Rembrandt, who thought it of more consequence to paint light than the objects that are seen by it, has done this in a picture of Achilles which I have. The head is kept down to a very low tint, in order to preserve this due gradation and distinction between the armour and the face ; the consequence of which is, that upon the whole, the picture is too black. Surely too much is sacrificed here to this narrow conception of nature : allowing the contrary conduct a fault, yet it must be acknowledged a less fault than making a picture so dark that it cannot be seen without a peculiar light, and then with difficulty. The merit or demerit of the different conduct of Rubens and Rembrandt in those instances which I have given, is not to be determined by the narrow principles of nature, separated from its effect on the human mind. Reason and common sense tell us, that

before, and above all other considerations, it is necessary that the work should be seen, not only without difficulty or inconvenience, but with pleasure and satisfaction; and every obstacle which stands in the way of this pleasure and convenience must be removed.

The tendency of this Discourse, with the instances which have been given, is not so much to place the artist above rules, as to teach him their reason; to prevent him from entertaining a narrow confined conception of art; to clear his mind from a perplexed variety of rules and their exceptions, by directing his attention to an intimate acquaintance with the passions and affections of the mind, from which all rules arise, and to which they are all referable. Art effects its purpose by their means; an accurate knowledge, therefore, of those passions and dispositions of the mind is necessary to him who desires to effect them upon sure and solid principles.

A complete essay or inquiry into the connection between the rules of Art, and the eternal and immutable dispositions of our passions, would be indeed going at once to the foundation of criticism;* but I am too well convinced what extensive knowledge, what subtle and penetrating judgment would be required, to engage in such an undertaking: it

* This was inadvertently said. I did not recollect the admirable treatise *On the Sublime and Beautiful*.

is enough for me, if, in the language of painters, I have produced a slight sketch of a part of this vast composition, but that sufficiently distinct to show the usefulness of such a theory, and its practicability.

Before I conclude, I cannot avoid making one observation on the pictures now before us. I have observed, that every candidate has copied the celebrated invention of Timanthes, in hiding the face of Agamemnon in his mantle; indeed such lavish encomiums have been bestowed on this thought, and that too by men of the highest character in critical knowledge,—Cicero, Quintilian, Valerius Maximus, and Pliny,—and have been since re-echoed by almost every modern that has written on the Arts, that your adopting it can neither be wondered at, nor blamed. It appears now to be so much connected with the subject, that the spectator would perhaps be disappointed in not finding united in the picture what he always united in his mind, and considered as indispensably belonging to the subject. But it may be observed, that those who praise this circumstance were not painters. They use it as an illustration only of their own art; it served their purpose, and it was certainly not their business to enter into the objections that lie against it in another art. I fear we have but very scanty means of exciting those powers over the imagination which make so very considerable and refined a part of poetry. It is a doubt with me, whether we

should even make the attempt. The chief, if not the only occasion which the painter has for this artifice, is, when the subject is improper to be more fully represented, either for the sake of decency, or to avoid what would be disagreeable to be seen; and this is not to raise or increase the passions, which is the reason that is given for this practice, but on the contrary to diminish their effect.

It is true, sketches, or such drawings as painters generally make for their works, give this pleasure of imagination to a high degree. From a slight, undetermined drawing, where the ideas of the composition and character are, as I may say, only just touched upon, the imagination supplies more than the painter himself, probably, could produce: and we accordingly often find that the finished work disappoints the expectation that was raised from the sketch; and this power of the imagination is one of the causes of the great pleasure we have in viewing a collection of drawings by great painters. These general ideas, which are expressed in sketches, correspond very well to the art often used in Poetry. A great part of the beauty of the celebrated description of Eve, in Milton's *PARADISE LOST*, consists in using only general indistinct expressions, every reader making out the detail according to his own particular imagination,—his own idea of beauty, grace, expression, dignity, or loveliness: but a painter, when he represents Eve on a canvass, is obliged to give a determined form, and his own idea of beauty distinctly expressed.

We cannot, on this occasion, nor indeed on any other, recommend an undeterminate manner or vague ideas of any kind, in a complete and finished picture. This notion, therefore, of leaving any thing to the imagination, opposes a very fixed and indispensable rule in our art,—that every thing shall be carefully and distinctly expressed, as if the painter knew, with correctness and precision, the exact form and character of whatever is introduced into the picture. This is what with us is called science and learning: which must not be sacrificed and given up for an uncertain and doubtful beauty, which, not naturally belonging to our art, will probably be sought for without success.

Mr. Falconet has observed, in a note on this passage in his translation of Pliny, that the circumstance of covering the face of Agamemnon was probably not in consequence of any fine imagination of the painter,—which he considers as a discovery of the critics,—but merely copied from the description of the sacrifice, as it is found in Euripides.

The words from which the picture is supposed to be taken, are these: *Agamemnon saw Iphigenia advance towards the fatal altar; he groaned, he turned aside his head, he shed tears, and covered his face with his robe.*

Falconet does not at all acquiesce in the praise that is bestowed on Timanthes; not only because it is not his invention, but because he thinks meanly of this trick of concealing, except in instances of

blood, where the objects would be too horrible to be seen ; but, says he, “ in an afflicted father, in a king, in Agamemnon, you, who are a painter, conceal from me the most interesting circumstance, and then put me off with sophistry and a veil. You are (he adds) a feeble painter, without resource : you do not know even those of your art ; I care not what veil it is, whether closed hands, arms raised, or any other action that conceals from me the countenance of the hero. You think of veiling Agamemnon ; you have unveiled your own ignorance. A painter who represents Agamemnon veiled, is as ridiculous as a poet would be, who, in a pathetic situation, in order to satisfy my expectations, and rid himself of the business, should say, that the sentiments of his hero are so far above whatever can be said on the occasion, that he shall say nothing.”

To what Falconet has said, we may add, that supposing this method of leaving the expression of grief to the imagination, to be, as it was thought to be, the invention of the painter, and that it deserves all the praise that has been given it, still it is a trick that will serve but once ; whoever does it a second time, will not only want novelty, but be justly suspected of using artifice to evade difficulties. If difficulties overcome make a great part of the merit of art, difficulties evaded can deserve but little commendation.

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